EXPLORATION OF PARENTAL MEDIA LITERACY AND PARENTAL MEDIATION STRATEGIES FOR ADVERTAINMENT CONTENT FEATURING POPULAR MEDIA CHARACTERS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Advertising does not stand alone, but rather naturally hides in editorial content or entertainment programs. For example, child-friendly media characters and related merchandise have become inseparable from advertising since the mid-twentieth century. Recently, media characters are the entertaining tools hidden in newer forms of advertising such as advertainment. However, due to their limited capacity and critical thinking skills, young children, particularly preschool-aged children, may be persuaded with such advertainment content. Thus, children are strongly encouraged to learn how advertisers use those media characters to sell more related merchandise across multiple media platforms (i.e., media literacy). Children need adults' guidance about how to deconstruct and understand persuasion attempts from media content. Parents are one of the consumer socializing agents who guide children's media habits and help them to acquire consumer knowledge. Despite the importance of parents' roles for children's media literacy, there is a lack of research regarding parental media literacy associated with parental mediation practice, particularly in the context of advertainment featuring popular media characters. Thus, my dissertation explores the influence of parental media literacy and parent perceptions of media characters on parental mediation of advertainment content. In the first study, one-on-one in-depth interviews were conducted with 35 parents (22 mothers and 13 fathers) to examine their understanding of advertainment and their perceptions of media characters. Parental mediation practice related to advertainment was also explored. Findings revealed that parents are likely to recognize the selling intent of the sponsored unboxing videos and general television advertisements, but not advergames. They were also likely to combine active mediation, restrictive mediation, and co-viewing. The first study offers rich insights about each parent, but no clear patterns emerged related to consistent relationships between parental media literacy and parental mediation. Also, the study also showed limited evidence related to whether positive or negative characters and type of advertainment (entertaining sponsored video vs. advergame) affect the way of parents mediate advertainment containing media characters. Thus, in the second study, with a between subjects experimental design (online experimental survey with 198 parents), I examined how type of media character (positive, negative) and type of advertainment content (advergame, unboxing video) individually and interactively influence parental mediation. In addition, the influence of parental media literacy on active mediation was also explored through the online experiment. Results revealed that the type of media character (negative),

parental media literacy and parents' educational level influenced parental mediation practice. Media characters which conveyed more negative qualities were likely to increase parental active mediation. Also, parental media literacy and parents' educational level were likely to be a significant predictor of all three types of parental mediation (active mediation, restrictive mediation, and coviewing). As a whole, findings across both studies suggest that parental media literacy and educational level significantly influence the way that parents mediate advertainment content containing licensed media characters or related merchandise. To have various conversations about media and advertising proactively with children, scholars may need attention on how we can enhance parental media literacy. This dissertation offers a few implications for advertising research and advertainment based on the consumer socialization framework. Suggestions and guidelines for developing media education programs and policy making about advertainment content are also presented.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Today, superheroes and Disney princesses are not only found in television or movies. They jump into every child-accessible medium and become a part of young children's lives. Hade (2001) provides this vivid example:

> "If I were a young boy today, I'd have an unimaginable range of choices through which to experience Curious George. In the morning I could wake up to the sound of my Curious George alarm clock ringing. Disbelieving it was already time to arise, I could turn on my Curious George lamp and check the time on my Curious George wall clock. Then I could throw off the Curious George comforter and kick down the Curious George bed sheet. Shuffling around the room, I might accidentally step on the toys I forgot to put away the night before: my Curious George drum, Curious George spinning top, Curious George jack-in-the-box (or more accurately George-in-the-box), and a host of Curious George puzzles. I'd slip on a Curious George T-shirt and my blue jeans" (p.158).

Famous characters which frequently appear to young children serve as a persuasion device (Kewalramani & Hedge, 2012). They provide opportunities for marketers to produce marketable products (Calvert, 2008; Kewalramani & Hedge, 2012) but also serve to sell their overarching stories as a whole. Marketers bring popular media characters into their strategies as a brand extension (Demott, 2015). Particularly, entertaining narratives and character familiarity drive young children's attention in marketing communication (e.g., Kewalramani & Hedge, 2012; Demott, 2015; Roberto et al., 2010). Hade's (2001) example of Curious George may sound unrealistic, but many children may dream surrounded by toys and merchandise of their favorite media characters.

Considering such attractiveness of popular licensed media characters, it is essential to consider the potential positive and negative influences of those characters. Some characters may provide benefits to children's cognitive and social development such as Dora the Explorer (Ryan, 2010) or Curious George (Concord Group Evaluation, 2012) whereas some character content may produce negative outcomes such as commercialism (Calvert, 2008; Hade, 2001; Schor, 2004; Thomas, 2009), gender stereotypes (Auster & Mansbach, 2012; Coyne et al., 2016;

Crockett, 2015; England et al., 2011; Murnen et al., 2016), and negative health effects (Emond et al., 2015; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Roberto et al., 2010). However, topics of existing studies are limited to popular media characters' influence on children's socialization in general. Little research has been conducted in terms of media characters and consumer socialization, especially from the parents' viewpoint. Also, previous literature provides few ideas about how parents mediate advertainment content featuring media characters, which is a brand communication incorporated within the content of entertainment (Russell, 2007). For instance, how do parents perceive and mediate advergames featuring Marvel superheroes?

The current study employs a theoretical framework of 'children's consumer socialization' (John, 1999; Ward, 1974) to understand how young children learn about and cope with persuasion, consumption and brands in the context of advertainment content portraying media characters. Within this broader context, a theoretical framework which describes how consumers process persuasive communication and how they cope with such attempts is referred to as the Persuasion Knowledge Model (e.g., Friestad & Wright, 1994; Ham et al., 2015; Kirmani & Campbell, 2004). How children understand and know about advertising persuasion attempts is addressed with studies of media/advertising literacy (e.g., Hobbs, 2011; Nelson, 2016). Young children (ages 0-7) have limited cognitive capacities to decode and analyze details in complex media messages (e.g., Friestad & Wright, 1994; John, 1999; McAlister & Cornwell, 2009), and they need media socialization or media literacy training in their early childhood to help decipher messages. These theories and frameworks provide the background for understanding parents' knowledge of and coping skills related to the influence of advertainment and media characters. The body of research in consumer socialization and media/advertising literacy also offers insights into where and how to begin teaching media literacy for parents of young children

pertaining to advertainment. See Figure 1.1 for the conceptual diagram of theoretical framework related to consumer socialization.

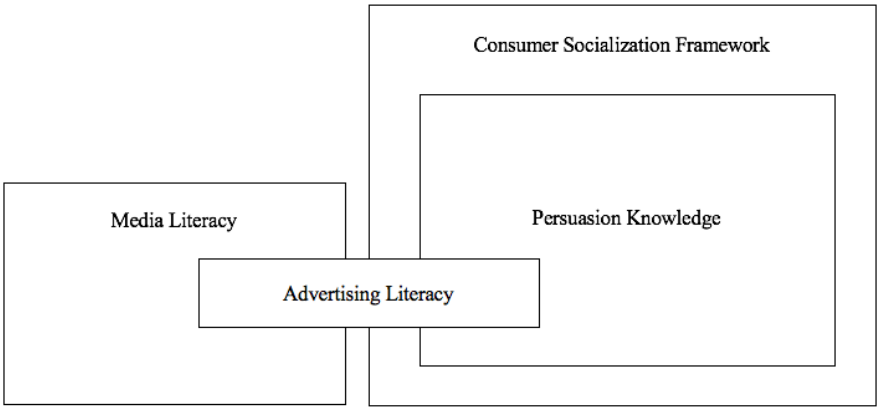

Figure 1.1 Conceptual diagram of theoretical frameworks related to consumer socialization

Despite the growing interest in children's persuasion knowledge and advertising literacy (e.g., An, Jin, & Park, 2014; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; John, 1999; Nelson, 2016), there have been no known studies exploring parental media literacy and parent mediation practices in the context of advertainment. Although previous literature focused on children's screen media use (e.g., television, mobile phone, video games; e.g., Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Shin & Huh, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 1999) or advertising (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Nelson, 2016), very few studies shed a light on popular media characters and their application in advertising. Children need to improve their level of media literacy regarding how to analyze and understand media content, especially with persuasive method characters, as well as how to use media in general. Particularly, for young children, they need guidance to discuss what they should accept and internalize and what they should reconsider and further ask questions. Thus, the current study aims to focus on the influence of parents on children's consumer socialization.

Young children's media literacy has typically been the purview of their parents, particularly when they are in the preoperational stage (age 2 to 7). During this age range, they are

in the stage of developing information processing skills and social behaviors by observing their surroundings (John, 1999). Those children in the pre-school age are still too young to understand how advertising works, but it is meaningful to begin conversations about advertising or limitedly expose them to advertising. Parents are one of the significant consumer socializing agents for children (e.g., Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Evans, Carlson & Hoy, 2013; John, 1999; Nelson et al., 2017) who teach them to be media/advertising literate. Scholars believe that parents should discuss advertising with their children (Potter, 2010). Other studies showed that parents are more likely to limit the exposure of media content or set rules on media use for these young children (Mendoza, 2009). Regarding media use, recent studies have suggested frequent and independent use of mobile devices by age 4 although traditionally parents were likely to co-view media content with children (Connell et al., 2015; Kabali et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2017). However, if parents are not watching media with their children, they may not be discussing the content or engaging in other media literacy strategies. Children urgently need guidance on how to independently recognize and analyze media and advertising messages in their childhood.

Nonetheless, there has been a lack of research exploring the influence of parental media literacy and parental mediation related to advertainment. Since parents' negative perceptions of media content have been correlated with parental mediation practice, only parents' critical thinking skills or their negative perceptions toward the media or related media content have been typically studied. For example, parental media literacy and parental mediation were discussed in Daneels and Vanwynsberghe (2017) and Rasmussen et al. (2016), but the contexts they employed were limited to television and social media. It is true that studies about advertainment content such as brand placements, advergames, or influencer marketing are emerging (e.g., Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013; Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Vanwesenbeeck et al. 2016).

However, advertainment content was not addressed related to parental media literacy and parental mediation. It is imperative to understand what parents know about these emerging forms of persuasion and how they may mediate their child's media use.

Thus, scholars may need to revisit parental mediation frameworks with respect to parental media literacy in the context of advertainment, especially with popular media characters which are known to attract children. It is crucial to explore advertainment featuring media characters because media characters in television programs, movies, comics, games, or even in toys deliver certain messages and values to children. When children view the characters they like in advertisements, character awareness and liking may spill over to product preference and purchase requests (e.g., Putnam, Cotto, & Calvert, 2018). Thus, character favoritism may significantly influence children's consumption behavior. Parents may also overlook negative aspects of the content due to their favoritism of the characters. Thus, parents' understanding of advertainment featuring media characters or related merchandise and their mediation strategies are important research topics. Thus, I propose these general research questions:

To what extent do parents understand advertainment portraying media characters? How would parents differently perform parental advertising mediation when media characters with negative qualities were presented in advertainment? How might they practice parental advertising mediation when the format of the advertainment is a game versus a sponsored video?

To address these questions, I conducted two studies with sequential exploratory design. First, I conducted one-on-one in-depth interviews with parents of young children (four to six years of age) since those young children are relatively susceptible to advertising messages (John, 1999; McAlister & Cornwell, 2009). Exploring parents' perceptions toward advertainment targeting young children and their ability to analyze the content allowed me to develop rich insights into parents' media literacy, parental mediation and character attitudes. This first study

also allowed me to construct and finalize materials for the second study, which was an online experimental survey with parents. After transcribing and analyzing the interviews (Study 1), I reflected on the ideas obtained from the interviews to formulate the second study. For example, selection of the media characters and video materials were determined based on the first study. Then, I examined, in an online experiment of parents, the effect of type of media characters (positive or negative) and type of advertainment content (toy unboxing video vs. advergame) on parental mediation practice. Also, the study analyzed how the level of parental media literacy and parents' demographic characteristics affect three types of parental mediation.

In the next chapter, I provide an overview of the history of child-directed advertising and marketing from the mid-twentieth century. This overview offers insights on how advertising to children has evolved over the years, including more recent tactics such as advertainment. Then, I explain children's consumer socialization and related theoretical frameworks (e.g., Persuasion Knowledge Model, media literacy and advertising literacy). Media characters and their influence on children's cognitive and social development as well as health are also discussed. Last, the chapter also explores parental mediation strategies (e.g., active mediation, restrictive mediation, and co-viewing) and related previous literature. Based on the review of this literature, I found that there is little research about advertainment content featuring media characters and parental mediation. Also, there has been a limited amount of studies which identified the association between parental media literacy and parental mediation. Thus, I reduced this research gap by conducting two studies with qualitative and quantitative research methods. Implications regarding media education and parental mediation are discussed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of child-directed advertising and marketing

Child-directed advertising and marketing using characters is not a new tactic. It has been developed through host-selling, licensing, adaptation, cross-platform distribution and so on for 70 years or more (e.g., Ilhan, 2011; Kline, 1993; Kunkel, 1988; Long, 2007). However, children today have greater access to media content, to experience characters in multiple forms, due to the changing media landscape. Blurred borders between advertising, information, education, and entertainment make it difficult to define what is advertising or not, particularly when it comes with child-friendly popular media characters. This next section describes a brief history of child-directed advertising and marketing, with a focus on media characters.

Child-directed marketing: Mid-twentieth century

I begin this review with the post-War World II period in the United States, because this is when the nature of advertising changed with economic improvement and modern domestic technologies (Seiter, 1993). One of the foundational shifts in U.S. households during the 1950-60s was an increase of working women (Oppenheimer, 1973; Seiter, 1993). The number of working women outside the home increased substantially (38% by the 1950s, Toossi, 2002), and this shift left an enormous demand in housework such as cooking dinner, cleaning the house and so on. Women needed to play with their children but also take care of their children's education. For those women, children's toys worked as a powerful babysitter, which can make their children pleasant but also 'teach' them (Kline, 1993; Seiter, 1993). For example, content within *Parents' Magazine* in the 1940s and 1950s suggested that parents should engage in activities that nursery school provides (Ogata, 2004). Increased household income and social pressure to provide 'appropriate stimulation' to children encouraged marketers to focus on the educational

value of toys. If marketers focused on 'selling delightful moments' to children during the early-mid twentieth century, they added educational value as a competitive key strategy to sell toys to parents. Cartoons and illustrations from magazines released in the 1950s show how toys' educational benefits were highlighted in the children's toy market. A cartoon by Al Kaufman from *Ladies Home Journal* published in 1955 described a toy section with a display of "Toys for Very Bright Children" crowded with parents. Parents in this period appear to be obsessed with children's achievement.

In the late 1950s, Disney amplified their child-directed advertising and marketing. In the 1950s, television emerged as the pre-eminent medium of consumer culture (Kline, 1993). Yet, it was challenging to create a lucrative market by television programmers because there was no 'established standard' of television programming. To fill the gap, programmers tried different experiments to discover the potential market. In 1955, Disney's innovative project, The Mickey Mouse Club, was successfully executed and inspired other television programmers to enter the market. Disney's innovative cartoon shorts, which included songs, tales, musicals, and dramas, and anthropomorphized animals, were very attractive for the child audience. Disney offered a clear blueprint for television programming, which attracted multiple sponsorships, toy manufacturers, and advertisers (Kline, 1993). Disney's remarkable success shed a light on character marketing, which facilitated mass production of tie-in merchandise (Alexander et al., 1998). In the early 1950s, today's well-known toy companies such as Mattel, Hasbro, Fisher-Price were not well recognized by consumers. However, Mattel started producing tie-in toys with the show The Mickey Mouse Club in 1955. This was one of the successful cases which stimulated a close relationship between television and toys.

In the 1960-70s, advertisers started directly addressing young children as an important

influencer as well as a "consuming unit" in the marketplace (Berey & Pollay, 1968). They tended to talk to children rather than parents. A few well-known toy companies confirmed that advertising can alter children's personal preference and impact family product purchasing through television advertising (Kline, 1993). Toy producers listened to children's opinions on toys and directly talked to them. For example, Hasbro researchers obtained practical toy ideas by asking young girls directly about toys and then the company turned that feedback into a series of My Little Pony dolls (Kline, 1993). Advertisers believed that a focus on child consumers may open new areas of experience and business. From this period, famous toy brands using characters appeared on the stage such as My Little Pony and Barbie, which were later developed into television programs.

In the 1970s, the effects of television content and the quality of programs were raised as important issues by a grassroots organization, Action for Children's Television (ACT). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) also attempted to reform children's television programs and advertising (Kundanis, 2003). In the Children's Television Report and Policy Statement 1974, the FCC asked broadcasters to take steps voluntarily to produce educational and informational children programs and voluntarily air a limited amount of advertising during children's programs (Lazar, 1994). Since 1974, the FCC also banned host-selling, which refers to "the use of the same characters in commercials as are featured in the adjacent program content" (Kunkel, 1988, p. 72). In 1979, the Commission's Children's Television Task Force examined the changes after the policy statement. The Commission stated that the industry complied to advertising self-regulation but had not voluntarily followed television programming guidelines (Kundanis, 2003).

Child-directed marketing: Late-twentieth century

The 1980s was the most revolutionary period for the toy industry. Deregulation of television advertising spurred subtle and powerful child-directed marketing to young children (Kline, 1993; Rostron, 1996; Steyer, 2002; Strasburger & Wilson, 2002). Specifically, under President Ronald Reagan, Congress lifted restrictions established to protect public interest. During the 1960s-1970s, the "trusteeship model" defined public interest focusing on fairness, social justice and responsibility. In the 1980s, however, public interest was redefined as 'market forces,' which reflected public taste and preferences (see more Lefevre-Gonzalez, 2013). By the deregulation of advertising, broadcasters were not required to limit advertising time per hour nor to satisfy needs of the community anymore (Rostron, 1996). Also, the FCC also responded to this trend and loosened its policies for program-length commercials (i.e. toy-based programs). In fact, the FCC rather described program-length commercials as "an innovative technique to fund children's programming" (FCC, 1985 p. 5 cited from Kunkel, 1988). With the relaxed children's television programming policies, program-length commercials or host-selling survived in the 1980s; they were dominant in this period, particularly with licensed media characters (e.g., *My Little Pony*, *Strawberry Shortcake*, *The Transformers*, etc., Rostron, 1996; Steyer, 2002; Strasburger et al., 2002). A high level of home video recorder penetration also encouraged toy-based videos for young children such as Strawberry Shortcake and My Little Pony (Seiter, 1993). Between 1983 and 1988, the number of program-length commercials increased from thirteen to seventy and related toys and merchandise sales also increased from $26.7 billion to $64.6 billion (Rostron, 1996). Action figures and dolls became even more 'branded' than ever. Toy-based shows or program-length commercials were different from television programs since they were 'free' from specific structure, timing, setting, and so on. Thus, they could substantially

differentiate their marketing tactics from Disney, which had been successfully selling tie-in products to young children since the 1950s. Advertisers reconfirmed the 'entertaining' value of child-directed branding.

In the late 1980s to 1990s, children's consumerism was reborn around imaginative pretend play and peer activity. In the late 1980s, character marketing encountered limits in increasing sales volumes and began failing to maintain the rapid growth in their businesses (Kline, 1993). As a result, the saturation of the tie-in merchandise affected available space to sell toy products in retail stores. Some advertisers strived to survive with creative messages, but there was a gap that toy marketers still could not satisfy. Also, Congress enacted The Children's Television Act (CTA) to increase informational and educational programs for children and limit advertising time for children to protect them from the commercialized media landscape (Kundanis, 2003, Rostron, 1996; Strasburger et al., 2002). In addition, a handful of studies were conducted to explore the effect of host-selling and program-length commercials (e.g., Greenfield et al., 1990; Kunkel, 1988). Kunkel (1988) suggested that young children cannot differentiate commercials and the program content when the host-selling tactic was employed. Also, it was revealed that the combination of program-length commercials and related toys was likely to negatively impact children's creative imagination (Greenfield et al., 1990). In the 1990s, Congress asked the FCC to step in restricting program-length commercials. The FCC narrowly defined program-length commercial as "a program associated with a product in which commercials for that product are aired" (FCC, 1991, p. 2117 cited from Strasburger et al., 2002, p. 83). This definition was nothing different from host-selling, and program-length commercials have survived even today.

In the late 1980s to the 1990s, advertisers also redirected children's attention to pretend play. In order to appeal to young consumers, advertising was less realistic in depicting their products and more dramatized the brands with television scenes and unique features of the products in the advertisements. For example, television commercials provided imaginary play scenarios showing how other children play with specific character toys. The Rambo toy commercial released in 1986 shows two boys playing with Rambo toys (Kline, 1993). The commercial employed narrative techniques using a dialogue, characters, and weapons of the Rambo series. Toy advertising highlighted the idea that pretend play can be more exciting when children have the right toys and use them in the right way. Character toys could make children re-engage in the characters with newer perspectives such as imaginative play with their peers (Schor, 2004).

Child-directed marketing: Early 2000s to Present

In recent years, immersive experiences invite young children to engage more deeply with brands. Beyond simple character marketing, transmedia storytelling has emerged as an innovative way of selling characters. The advanced media landscape has fostered children to consume more than ever as explained by Henry Jenkins (2006):

> A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction [...] Reading across the media sustains a depth of experience that motivates more consumption. (pp. 95-96).

Jenkins explains how each medium works as an entry into the character world and allows the audience to fully engage in the overarching storyline. Consumers can experience 'transmedia storytelling' by reading comic books or playing games or with toys directly. However, engaging with all accessible media provides a more holistic experience of the character world. Even co-creation adds new values to a new character world. For example, now Lego also provides a

platform where people can share their Lego ideas (Plessis, 2018). Lego's co-creation approach attracted Lego fans who not only share knowledge and their interests with other people but also with the brand. Technological advancement has enabled the audience to explore multifaceted entertainment content across various platforms, which has turned to a 'transmedia branding and experience'. Selling characters to the audience has also changed in a way that is more subtle and entertaining. As the boundaries between education, entertainment, commercialism, and information become blurred, marketers also have provided holistic edu-taining experiences to the audience. Toys work as one of the tools for young children to easily enter the world of characters and tell their own tales (Demott, 2015). This means that transmedia branding invites children to participate in the character world in a meaningful way.

Transmedia storytelling and branding are different marketing approaches from related constructs such as cross-platform distribution, adaptation or licensing. Cross-platform distribution is simply distributing the same media content from one platform to another (Ilhan, 2011). For instance, if Frozen's original story is available in television, DVD, and social media; its marketing strategy would be cross-platform distribution. On the other hand, in transmedia storytelling, each medium tells a different story. Each medium, which works as an entry into a character world, does what it can do best to unfold the meta-narrative in its own way. Thus, we can explore Frozen's stories in different angles and learn each episode of Elsa, Anna, Olaf, Kristoff, and Hans, etc. - entering the world of Frozen. Another construct, adaptation, can be defined as retelling the original stories in a different perspective or different setting. In other words, a story is reinterpreted in a new angle (Ilhan, 2011; Long, 2007). Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare in 1597, but later many producers adapted this classic into films in a new setting. They are all the basic story of Romeo and Juliet, but the classic

version and the adapted films are distinctive – they are not identical. Licensing, on the other hand, is "a contractual arrangement where one organization gives another the rights to produce, sell, or use something in return for payment" (Ilhan, 2011, p.45). As Jenkins (2006) noted, the licensing system generates the same stories and characters through multiple media platforms. Media content is not changed or newly created beyond the original story. However, through transmediation, each medium delivers the stories which craft a single character world or single overarching storyline (Ilhan, 2011).

Interestingly, boundaries between media are also becoming blurred and meaningless. There was a clearer line between toys and video games in the past. However, toys are no longer only physical objects; through technological advancements, they are merged with diverse media such as video games and smart phones. Marketers and game developers collaborate to incorporate two different forms of media to provide interactive entertainment experiences to young consumers. For instance, Warner Bros, TT Games and The Lego Group introduced Lego Dimensions, which combines physical Lego bricks and console gameplay (Trangbaek, 2015). Characters from the Lego Movie and other movie franchises joined in Lego Dimensions such as Batman from Lego BatmobileTM, Wyldstyle from Lego Movie, and Gandalf from The Lord of the Rings. Lego Gateway is made with Lego bricks and three Lego mini-figures which become the means of starting Lego video games. Another innovation was made through the integration of toys and apps (Chaker, 2014). Lego's Fusion is an example of the toy-app combination. Lego captured parents' concerns about the 'zombie gaze' phenomenon while children are using a smartphone or a tablet. Thus, Lego developed a *Fusion* game which enables children to have fun building with Lego bricks in the real world.

A boundary between entertainment and education is also getting blurred. Media characters now appear in children's learning apps such as Disney interactive storybooks (Graser, 2013), PBS Kids games (Chiong & Shuler, 2010; Cohen, 2011). For example, Disney established an app where young children can read the stories of Disney characters from Frozen, Monster University, and Planes (Graser, 2013). The app features interactive stories with the original Frozen soundtrack. It also includes drawing tools and other games for children to enjoy the immersive experience of Frozen. Such multimodal reading of Frozen's story was found to motivate children go to the movie theater. PBS Kids, a child-friendly broadcasting television network, also provides a variety of educational games and videos. They are not only perceived as educational by parents but also increase learning gains such as identifying vocabulary and rhyming (Chiong & Shuler 2010).

In addition, another lucrative channel of toy advertising has opened to the public: Unboxing videos. This simple video includes one to two people unpacking and demonstrating new products, including toys (Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018). The most popular top 10 searched toys were highlighted in YouTube unboxing videos and store haul videos (Sullivan, 2018). The evolution of digital technologies propels toy brands and companies to collaborate with free online video platforms such as YouTube (Fitz-Gerald, 2017; Li, 2015; Loveday, 2017). On an online video platform, online video users actively create and upload their unboxing videos to demonstrate and assemble new toys and other products. According to Common Sense Media (2017), 17 percent of children ages 0 to 8 watched online videos on a website and 34 percent of the online video users watched unboxing videos. Hoy, Childers, and Evans (2018) also noted the popularity of influencer marketing throughout social media platforms such as YouTube. Influencer marketing refers to marketing tactics using celebrities, social media stars or industry

experts who can significantly affect the audience's brand preferences and decision making (Hoy, Childers & Evans, 2018; eMarketer, 2016). In this case, child influencers are promoting products as an ad endorser on their own social media channels.

There are several popular YouTube stars sharing their new toy unboxing experience with online users. One of the top child influencers is Evan, who earned about $1.3 million in revenue from Google ads and other projects. There are more than 2 million followers in his YouTube Channel "EvanTube HD" (Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018). More recently, Ryan, who hosts Ryan Toy's Review, was named the highest paid YouTube star (Robehmed & Berg, 2018). Ryan Toy's Review drove 17 million subscribers and 22 million dollars of earnings in 2018. His video clips typically show him unboxing toys and playing with them. Ryan's videos also include interactions with his parents regarding his reactions toward new toys and play. A line of his toy collectibles was launched in summer 2018 in Walmart stores nationwide (Pisani, 2018).

In addition to YouTube stars, one of the trends on YouTube, unboxing behavior, helped to inspire the creation of a new line of collectible toy brands, LOL Surprise Dolls (Semuels, 2018). MGA figured out a consumer insight that children like to unpack and peel new toys. LOL Surprise Dolls package does not show which type of dolls and accessories are included. Children need to peel away seven layers of packaging and input secret codes to open the package. Also, this 'mystery toy' makes young children explore more surprises by watching LOL Surprise Doll unboxing videos.

Unboxing is a powerful tool to sell toys of transmedia brands, which use all different media channels and tactics (Loveday, 2017). Also, in some cases, sponsored unboxing videos do not always clearly disclose their sponsorship and these entertaining 'how-to' toy videos are not categorized as 'advertising'. However, advertising regulations and policies are not updated yet

for a child audience. The focus of FTC's guidelines for covert marketing and native advertising is limited to adult audiences (Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018). Recently, the Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU) also recommended inserting audio disclosure of sponsorship at the beginning of each sponsored video because they believed that the commercial nature of those videos was not adequately disclosed to the audience during the videos on EvanTube HD and Ryan Toy's Review (CARU 2016, 2017). Since young children are not able to read yet, CARU directed two channels to add audio disclosure. As such, FTC and CARU have reviewed whether advertisers' commercial practice is not misleading and deceptive.

Summary

Although a wealth of evidence shows that the use of characters in media has evolved into more forms of life, media characters have not typically not been labeled as persuasion or considered as a powerful persuasion tool. Rather, characters have naturally settled down in both children's and parents' lives where it is difficult to recognize selling intent. As one of the primary children's socializing agents, parents should pay attention to how advertisers establish various subtle marketing approaches using media characters to target children. Media literate parents may proactively start conversations about media and advertising with their children. To begin, we need to understand how consumer socialization occurs - how children acquire skills and knowledge with respect to consumer acts and media messages. The next section discusses the theoretical background about consumer socialization of children and related concepts.

Theoretical Framework

Consumer Socialization

Socialization is a broad term generally used to describe the process of how individuals learn skills and knowledge to participate as members of society. In the 1970s, Ward (1974) coined the term "consumer socialization" to elaborate the process of acquiring experiences and knowledge related to consumption. Ward (1974) particularly focused on childhood consumer socialization to recognize how early learning affects later understanding of consumption and the marketplace. He noted that consumer socialization does not only prepare oneself to be a good consumer but also to satisfy social expectations. Ward explains that consumer behavior is rooted in one's roles and norms. For instance, he discussed the example of a college student's purchase of a dark suit for an interview. The job interview manner and norms activate the college student to purchase a particular kind of suit to show his attitude toward the interview. Thus, in the 1970s, advertising was viewed, in part, as a tool which tells consumers 'what-to-know'. Ward suggested that advertising offers information so that consumers can make better decisions in the marketplace.

Relevant here, Ward (1974) reviewed how children's consumer socialization occurs within cognitive development perspectives. His paper explains the work of Piaget (1929), Kohlberg (1969), and others who sought to describe qualitative changes in children's cognitive development. The most well-known framework of cognitive development suggested by Piaget (1929) proposes four main stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor (0-2 years), preoperational (2-7 years), concrete operational (7-11 years), and formal operational (11-adulthood). Piaget's framework supports the notions that children may have different cognitive capacities to understand and internalize the stimuli around them. Ward also described that

Bandura's (1971) observational and imitation learning explains how children acquire knowledge and skills related to consumption. Ward recognized that parents are less likely to be involved in 'consumption' training, but rather use subtle approaches, letting their children observe and experience what the 'consumption' is (i.e., social learning). Ward's review of children's learning became the blueprint of consumer socialization research. Ward (1974) encouraged future scholars to empirically investigate which personal characteristics and environmental settings determine children's consumer socialization including social structure factors.

In the late 1970s, Moschis and Churchill (1978) constructed a conceptual model of consumer socialization, which embraces the cognitive development model and the social learning model. Their research focus was related to social structural variables such as family, peers, mass media, and school. Adolescent participants completed questionnaires regarding consumer skills (e.g., consumer activism, economic motives, finance management) and the influence of socialization agents (e.g., media, parents, peers, etc.). The findings show that family communication regarding consumption positively affects adolescents' socially desirable consumer acts. Adolescents' economic motives were likely to be influenced by family communication, which means there is an overt child-parent 'consumption' training. In addition, mass media (e.g., television viewing) influenced adolescents' social motivation to consume more significantly. Age was the strongest predictor of consumer knowledge (i.e., consumer affairs knowledge, consumer activism, and ability to manage consumer finances). Also, peers were influential for adolescents' social motives, materialism, and consumer affairs knowledge. The research suggested that the cognitive development model better explains children's acquisition of consumer knowledge and coping skills whereas the social learning model more effectively

elaborated children's attitudes and values about consumption. This paper is considered to be a seminal paper of consumer socialization.

More than two decades later, John (1999) provided a 25-year-review of research on consumer socialization of children based on the cognitive development model (e.g., Piaget) and social learning model (Bandura, 1971, 1986). She presented a summary of how consumer socialization transforms as children grow older and mature in understanding consumer acts and advertising/marketing tactics. While Ward (1974) reviewed literature related to children's learning consumer knowledge in general, John particularly elaborated specifically on children's knowledge in brands, advertising, shopping, pricing, and decision making as well as parental mediation strategies.

From the existing literature, John (1999) noted that children at the preoperational stage (2-7 years) can limitedly concentrate on single observable aspects of their environment, which makes it difficult for them to thoughtfully process what they actually see. Thus, they are likely to accept perception as 'reality'. Therefore, children at this stage have limited ability to decode media messages even though they recognize perceptual features or commercials, brands, and product categories. Also, she pointed out that children in this stage generally elicit positive attitudes toward advertising. Children typically only become alarmed by the negative aspects of advertising tactics when they reach the analytical stage (or concrete operational stage, 7-11 years). They retrieve related information sources to evaluate persuasive strategies. Later, children in the reflective stage (11-16 years) show skeptical attitudes toward advertising with substantial awareness of brands and complex media messages. John's (1999) review of literature on the consumer socialization of children further motivated researchers to delve into consumer

socialization for children in different life stages (e.g., McAlister & Cornwell, 2009; Nelson et al., 2017; Wang, Yu, & Wei, 2012).

As noted above, consumer socialization is a broad theoretical framework which helps us understand how young children learn about consumption and brands. Within that broader framework, the understanding of how consumers process persuasive communication and how they cope with such attempts is encapsulated within the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM; Friestad & Wright, 1994) and media/advertising literacy, which primarily focus on media content including persuasive messages. Persuasion knowledge and media/advertising literacy studies have enabled us to assess consumers' knowledge and coping strategies for persuasive communication.

Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)

Traditionally, persuasion knowledge refers to the understanding of why and how persuasion "agents" constructed and delivered a certain type of persuasive message to the audience (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Ham and Nelson, forthcoming; Nelson et al., 2017). Friestad and Wright (1994) established the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) to understand how audiences develop persuasion knowledge and how they utilize it to analyze, evaluate, and cope with the intent of persuasion agents (such as advertisers) to persuade. Although this model could be applied in other persuasive contexts in other social science disciplines, this model has been employed in the marketing or advertising context more frequently (Ham & Nelson, forthcoming). The traditional PKM introduces and elaborates on multiple constructs of the persuasion process. There are two parties involved in the communication process: the target (a consumer who is considered as the target of the persuasion episode) and the agent (any person or organization which attempts to persuade the target). Between the two parties, the persuasion

episode occurs, which refers to agents' strategic attempts to deliver their persuasive message and influence the target's beliefs, attitudes, or behavioral intentions toward the agent.

To respond to the persuasive episodes, three types of knowledge determine and control the outcome of the interaction. The first is the "persuasion knowledge," which includes the understanding of how persuasion occurs by the agent. The second is the target's knowledge, which consists of beliefs or stereotypes about the agents' abilities, goals, or motives (e.g., salesperson, advertisers, etc.). The third is "topic knowledge," which refers to the target's knowledge or beliefs about the subject of the message. With the constructed knowledge described above, the target can respond to and/or cope in various ways with the persuasion episodes. For instance, when a person is familiar with persuasive tactics - reexamining the campaigns and increasing their awareness of repeated tactics and messages, he or she may not simply make conclusions about advertisers or products, but rather engage in complex evaluations of these persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The consumer may adequately 'cope' with the argument such as counterarguing or ignoring blatant persuasive attempts.

Persuasion knowledge has been discussed broader than just simple market knowledge. Nelson and Ham (forthcoming) underscored the interplay between agents' and targets' persuasion knowledge, meaning that persuasion knowledge is crafted and established based on what marketers and consumers believe. Even with the same consumer experience, each consumer may have different knowledge and perceptions about a brand. However, it activates various previous accumulated knowledge regarding how to react and cope with given persuasive episodes.

As noted by previous literature, Friestad and Wright (1994) also argued that young children are likely to ignore or miss the opportunity to grasp the nature of persuasion in the

persuasion episode. Persuasion knowledge helps a target identify and interpret the agents' persuasive attempts. This skill develops based on one's cognitive skills and their accumulated experience in understanding how persuasive episodes operate. This explains why adults who have been more involved in persuasion events (e.g., advertisements) are more likely to detect the selling intent of advertising than young children.

Due to a lack of persuasion knowledge, children, particularly those who are in the pre-operational stage, show positive attitudes toward advertising compared to adults (John, 1999). By identifying the advertiser's purpose of interaction, consumers develop strategies to help them reach their goals, such as not engaging in impulsive buying or comparing prices before purchasing. When a hidden persuasive message is revealed, the activation of persuasion knowledge can heighten skepticism, resistance, or negative attitudes toward the advertising and brand (Evans et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2009). Such coping strategies develop as consumers experience various persuasive episodes.

However, children at the preschool age (preoperational stage) have limited ability to process persuasive messages. Recognition ability and persuasion knowledge of children at the preoperational stage are not fully developed, but emerging, since they don't have numerous experiences in persuasion tactics (McAlister & Cornwell, 2009, 2010). Also, identifying selling intent does not always elicit skepticism or negative attitudes toward the advertising in the case of children. In Mallinckrodt and Mizerski's (2007) study, we could observe that persuasion knowledge has little influence on brand preference of children at age 5 to 8, particularly if an entertaining component is added. They found that children's age is positively associated with persuasion knowledge regarding an advergame, but no causal relationship was found between the children's persuasion knowledge and brand preference and request intentions after the

advergame. Thus, it is crucial to think about the effective ways that parents can begin conversations about advertising with children at this stage.

Advertising literacy

Advertising literacy is also a part of media literacy, which is defined as a set of perspectives and skills to filter and evaluate mass media messages (Potter, 2010). It is a part of broader concept of media literacy or persuasion knowledge in the field of advertising (Hudders, Cauberghe, & Panic, 2016). An assumption in the field of advertising behind developing one's advertising literacy is that advertising is not beneficial to children. Advertising literacy represents an individual's ability to identify, evaluate, and cope solely with advertising messages (Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Nelson, 2016). Kunkel (2010) conceptualized advertising literacy as an understanding of (a) selling and persuasive intent of advertising and (b) advertising bias, which are also classified as 'cognitive' advertising literacy (Hudders, Cauberghe, & Panic, 2016). Some scholars further moved on to 'affective' advertising literacy (often operationalized as ad skepticism, ad disliking; Hudders, Cauberghe, & Panic, 2016; Rozendaal et al., 2011) to cope with current advertising techniques.

However, it is still questionable whether provoking negative emotions and reducing brand attitudes is always necessary for children. Children have limited ability to adequately internalize the messages from advertisements. Thus, they are under their parents' or caregivers' guidance and control to learn healthy media habits and consumer experience. As Hobbs (2011) argued regarding media literacy, there must be positive aspects of advertising such as learning about brands and immersive consumer experience through different media channels. Such learning might also intrigue children to be co-creators or inventors of brands. We could also expect how advertising literacy could empower consumers and experience 'co-creation'.

Media literacy

Compared to persuasion knowledge, media literacy refers to "specific knowledge and skills that help critical understanding and usage of the media" (Jeong, Cho, & Hwang, 2012, p. 455). The National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy Education (n.d.) stated that media literacy refers to "access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication." We can use media literacy to interpret and analyze various types of media content including advertising, news, entertainment, and so on.

There is a tension in the scholarly literature between protectionist and empowerment perspectives regarding media literacy. Some media studies argued that media literacy is needed to protect oneself from potentially harmful media effects (e.g., violence and sexual behavior, see more details in Jeong, Cho, & Hwang, 2012). Potter (2010) suggested that it is even important to recognize weak and subtle media messages which may form a certain media culture or behavior of one's life.

On the other hand, scholars with an empowerment perspective also emphasize how media literacy helps media users to be competent in reading and using messages and creating their own media content. Hobbs (2011) noted positive aspects of learning media literacy, especially in the digital age. Technological advancement in media enables children and young people to enjoy media as media makers as well as media users. Such prosumer experience becomes a means for "building self-esteem, forming identity, developing critical thinking skills about media and technology, and promoting intercultural exchange" (Cole et al., 2007 cited by Hobbs, 2011, p. 423).

There have been investigations about adults' general media literacy skills periodically. According to a recent Ofcom report (2018) about adult's media use and attitudes, many adults

have a lack of understanding of how online information is distributed and funded by advertisers. Even though more people are using online platforms to communicate and consume media content, their critical thinking skill or media literacy levels regarding online media is still low. For example, adults are somewhat aware of funding sources of search engines, but not about online streaming services or mobile apps. Few people knew that advertisers collect online users' personal information for their marketing strategies.

There have been also studies regarding assessment of media literacy. Although there is no consensus about measuring media literacy, there have been two ways to assess media literacy for adults. The first way is measuring individuals' media competencies in a self-report method. Based on the definition by Aufderheide and Firestone (1993), scholars have used the scale which combined the U.S. and British theoretical models of media literacy (Bazalgette, 1992; Primack et al., 2006; Thoman, 2003). This model includes three media literacy domains: authors and audiences, messages and meanings, and representations and reality. Table 2.1 shows eight core concepts of media literacy.

Media Literacy Domain	Core Concepts of Media Literacy
Authors and Audiences (AA)	AA1: Authors create media messages for profit and/or influence. AA2: Authors target specific audiences.
Messages and Meanings (MM)	MM1: Messages contain values and specific points of view. MM2: Different people interpret messages differently. MM3: Messages affect attitudes and behaviors. MM4: Multiple production techniques are used.
Representation and Reality (RR)	RR1: Messages filter reality. RR2: Messages omit information.

Table 2.1 Media Literacy Theoretical Framework

In early 2000, based on the eight domains above, Primack et al. (2006) developed and validated the smoking media literacy scale. Bier et al. (2010) also generated the general media literacy scale based on Primack et al. (2006), and it was recently used by Nelson et al. (under review) to assess the effectiveness of a health and media literacy intervention program in Jamaica. More details will be discussed in the method section (Chapter 7).

The second way of assessing media literacy is to directly ask participants to recall the given media content, discuss the purpose and technique, and evaluate the content. Based on Aufderheide and Firestone's (1993) operationalization, a handful of studies constructed a media literacy assessment scale for college students (e.g., Arke & Primack, 2009; Duran et al., 2008; Hobbs & Frost, 1998, 2003). For example, Hobbs and Frost (1998) investigated whether college students could identify the target audience, information sources, techniques, and omitted facts from news programs. In their follow-up study (Hobbs & Frost, 2003), they assessed students' reading comprehension, listening comprehension, viewing comprehension, and writing skills after taking their media literacy course. Arke and Primack (2009) also employed Aufderheide and Firestone's (1993) conceptual definition of media literacy and used five different domains for the measurement: recall, purpose, viewpoint, technique, and evaluation of media. 'Recall' measures how a person can recall specific events or information from a certain media content. 'Purpose' measures if a person can identify the purpose of the content or the message. The 'Viewpoint' domain evaluates how a person can recognize a message sender and evaluate what other perspectives are missing. 'Technique' measures how a person can understand appealing tactics that capture the audience's attention. Finally, 'evaluation' assesses a person's reactions to the content – attitudes and inferences suggested by the content.

In more recent studies, media literacy was developed further in various dimensions which include functional media literacy and critical media literacy (e.g., Buckingham, 2003). Functional media literacy is defined as the individual's ability to process technical characteristics of new media technologies on various media platforms. On the other hand, critical media literacy refers to one's ability to understand "textual and social meanings of media content, social values, purpose of the media producers as well as the power position of the media producers and

audience" (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011, p. 86). Chen, Wu, and Wang (2011) noted that both media literacies are necessary for media users. We need to be familiar with technical language and functions of new media as a tool, but we also need a critical lens to adequately process various contexts of media consumption and production (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011; Koc & Barut, 2016). Considering the definition of each media literacy, critical media literacy reflects the domains of media literacy suggested by Aufderheide and Firestone (1993). It also shares a few attributes with general media literacy from the previous literature (e.g., Arke & Primack, 2009; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Primack et al., 2006). However, scholars have not reached consensus about defining and measuring media literacy.

Ambiguity between advertising, information, and entertainment: Recognizing persuasion

Drastic changes in the media landscape and advanced advertising tactics disguise the advertising intention behind original media content, which makes it difficult to recognize if the content is advertising or information or entertainment. Since persuasion knowledge encourages consumers to think of the original motives of advertisers, recent advertising tactics naturally approach consumers with native advertising. According to Wojdynski and Golan (2016), native advertising refers to "the practice by which a marketer borrows from the credibility of a content publisher by presenting paid content in a format and location that matches the publisher's original content" (p. 3). Therefore, advertising is presented and intermingled with non-sponsored content on various media platforms (Wojdynski, Evans, & Hoy, 2018). It takes the form of a news article, social media post, advergame, and even influencer marketing (Evans et al., 2017; Wojdynski, Evans, & Hoy, 2018).

There has been an extensive body of literature about children's persuasion knowledge, media or advertising literacy (e.g., An, Jin, & Park, 2014; Ham, Nelson, & Das, 2015; Hudders

& Cauberghe, 2018; Nelson, 2016; Panic, Cauberghe, & Pelsmacker, 2013; Van Reijmersdal, Rozendaal, & Buijzen, 2012; Waiguny, Nelson, & Terlutter, 2012), but few scholars explored parents' media literacy in advertising contexts. Persuasion knowledge is less likely to be activated when the advertiser's intent is hidden in the information or entertainment even for parents. Evans, Carlson, and Hoy (2013) noted that parents lack the ability to accurately identify child-targeted advergaming on brand websites. In their study, parents did not adequately discriminate advergames and non-advergames (note: advergames are created to promote a product, service, or a company). Even though a definition and criteria of advergames were provided, parents were confused about how to pinpoint advergames due to a lack of prior knowledge. They were more familiar with traditional advertising such as television advertisements, which they have encountered since their own childhood. In addition, Evans and Hoy (2016) showed that parents who were given an advertising disclosure (single or dual modality) reported a higher level of selling and persuasion knowledge compared to parents who were directly provided an advergame without any disclosure. His finding also indicates that parents need sponsorship transparency to clearly evaluate advertainment content. Newman and Oates's (2014) study also found that parents were unfamiliar with newer media of food marketing communication.

Finally, a recent study by Hoy, Childers, and Evans (2018) investigated parents' understanding of sponsored child-targeted unboxing videos. The findings showed that parents expressed less concern about those sponsored unboxing videos since the content is relatively non-violent or non-sexual. Parents showed less concern or awareness of sponsored unboxing videos, which do not or ambiguously disclose sponsorship. Parents were less likely to talk about sponsored unboxing videos despite their confusion about the videos. As a whole, this literature

indicates the ambiguous line between advertising and entertainment and lack of persuasion knowledge among parents for these newer forms of advertising.

Nonetheless, literature pertaining to advertainment has only been reviewed in general for advergames, brand placements, or influencer marketing. Popular media characters, particularly many licensed transmedia characters, drive young children's attention through various forms of advertainment content. Little has been studied about consumers' understanding of advertainment content portraying popular media characters. If parents perceive a negative effect of media characters, how would it affect their attitudes, mediation or coping strategies? The following section reviews existing literature pertaining to expected positive and negative outcomes from media character-related content and marketing.

Potential outcomes and effects of media content and merchandise of media characters

Media characters are utilized as one of the means to build brand preference and loyalty to brands. Particularly, they are frequently employed in advertisements to attract young audiences. The widespread use of popular licensed media characters which live across multiple media platforms are a part of transmedia storytelling and branding. For example, Elsa from Frozen can be observed in movies and books, but also games, toys, mobile learning app (e.g., learning ABC). By exposing various aspects of characters' stories in advertising, any product promotion can be entertaining and appealing to children at the preoperational stage, who cannot sophisticatedly process hidden advertising messages. The ubiquitous use of characters across media suggests it is necessary to consider the potential positive and negative consequences of the characters. This is reviewed next.

Positive outcomes expected from media character-related content and marketing

Character marketing and advertising can help children by providing education and entertainment simultaneously (Davies, 2010; Schor, 2004; Thomas, 2009). This trend was one of the major themes of toy advertising in the mid-twentieth century. Scholars have demonstrated that media characters in educational programs can positively affect children's socialization and development (e.g., Anderson et al., 2000; Calvert et al., 2007; Concord Evaluation Group, 2012; Keys, 2016; Kirkorian, Wartella, & Anderson, 2008; Lauricella, Gola, Calvert, 2011; Ryan, 2010). Children also learn social skills and engage in problem-solving tasks through educational programs (Calvert et al., 2007). Media characters also similarly work as a model for children. By observing how characters talk and behave, children often internalize the characteristics which they think are acceptable. Children also actively engage in parasocial relationships with media characters (i.e., one-sided communication that children form with media characters; Richards & Calvert, 2017). Thus, some programs and characters are designed to enhance children's academic or social benefits (Kirkorian, Wartella, & Anderson, 2008).

Thus, some characters are expected to produce positive outcomes for young children. For instance, Dora the Explorer is considered an empowering Latina who partners with young viewers to go on a journey together (Ryan, 2010). Also, Curious George stimulates children's interests in social and cognitive problem solving and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) activities. George's curiosity, problem solving, and activities in the episodes can motivate children's interests in the STEM area (i.e., math and science). A study by Concord Evaluation Group (2012) revealed that Curious George books and television programs boosted young children's math and science knowledge and motivated them to learn more. In addition, Curious George stories also made parents feel more confident about their ability to help their children engage in STEM-related activities. Other television programs designed for young

children were also likely to increase children's problem-solving skills and prosocial behaviors (Anderson et al., 2000) and school readiness (Kearney & Levine, 2015; Kirkorian, Wartella, & Anderson, 2008). Also, media characters attract young children to read books and engage in literacy efforts. Ahn and Nelson (2019) observed that parents were likely to respect children's interests and their favorite character books. Parents were even more likely to accept books displaying some violent media characters than related television or movies (e.g., Marvel superheroes or Star Wars) because the literacy benefits outweighed any potential negative effects. In consideration of these benefits, educators suggest that using media characters is a powerful tool to invite young children to fun learning experiences.

In addition, media conglomerates (e.g., Disney, Nickelodeon) also actively encourage children to be more independent and feel powerful (Banet-Weiser, 2007; Schor, 2004). Children have little control over the world, particularly within their home environment. Marketers argue that their toy products provide freedom, possibility, and fantasies which are limited in children's reality. This is how Nickelodeon has established Nickelodeon Nation with child consumer citizenship through 'rights' and 'empowerment' messages (Banet-Weiser, 2007). The network portrayed children as smart and actively engaging 'citizens' of the community (e.g., children involving in real news shows or voting in U.S. presidential candidates). However, Nickelodeon's ideologies were explored within the consumer marketplace. Indeed, friendly character merchandise may lead young children to explore various stories as well as enhance self-esteem and social confidence as 'consumer citizens.'

Negative outcomes expected from character-related content and marketing

Commercialism Nonetheless, there are also potentially detrimental effects of character products and marketing. Educational programs with media characters may work as an entry to

the world of media characters and related merchandise. Advertisers notice children's well-recognized characters in the programs and develop new series of stories and related products (i.e., transmedia storytelling and branding). Transmedia storytelling occurs within various forms of media channels. Around the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the adaptation of children's books occurred through television and films (Davies, 2010). Characters from cinematic films such as those produced by Disney have a significant entertainment value, which can be easily embedded in children's books and sold in the marketplace (Kewalramani & Hegde, 2012; Schor, 2004). Today, adaptation or cross-over evolves to transmedia storytelling. Disney's Frozen is one of the representative examples. Their original story was released through a film in 2013, and various types of Frozen character stories, related to the original storyline, were produced and sold to young children. Lego also has co-created its stories with the other original series such as Marvel and DC superhero series (Demott, 2015). Transmedia storytelling provides an opportunity to enter the character's world which may lead them to purchase-related merchandise (Tenderich, 2014).

Transmedia branding tactics are attractive for young children. Global retail sales of licensed products of the Walt Disney Company, one of the representative licensing conglomerates, reached a new high of $56.6 billion in 2017 (License Global, 2017). Its licensed character brand Captain America: Civil War, Finding Dory, Zootopia, and Rogue One: A Star Wars Story helped Disney to remain as the top licensing brand (Handley, 2017). Hasbro's Disney princess line up contributed to its 53% increased revenue, which is $397 million (Bomey, 2017). Growing retail sales of transmedia brands show the magical wonder of character marketing. A tie between transmedia storytelling and branding suggests that we need to systematically review the media content but also the related merchandise together.

A new way of transmedia branding has occurred recently through unboxing videos. As noted in the previous chapter, organic or sponsored unboxing videos also highlight purchasing licensed media character toys. From unboxing videos targeting young children, one or two people unpack and introduce new toys (Common Sense Media, 2017; Fitz-Gerald, 2017; Li, 2015; Loveday, 2017). Although unboxing video content has not been investigated rigorously, we observe popular licensed character merchandise (Kinder Eggs with licensed toys, Barbie, Disney Princesses, Lego, etc.) very easily from the videos. Similar to traditional advertising, unboxing videos contain vivid demonstrations of how toys work and how they excite players, which becomes a new form of advertising online. Ryan, a 6-year-old popular child influencer, earned $11 million in one year (Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018; Schmidt, 2017). About 1,000 toy- or play-videos have been posted on Ryan's Toy Review, and one third of them feature media character-related toys or content (e.g., costumes, pretend plays). Ryan influences a young audience to watch the videos and to engage in the same toys and imaginative play, not as a stranger but as a friend (Schmidt, 2017). Children enjoy watching different types of unboxing videos and are exposed to various toys, particularly media character-related toys from those toy unboxing video channels.

Gender stereotypes and norms Scholars have noted that there are more popular gender-typed media characters in the market (e.g., Auster & Mansbach, 2012; Coyne et al., 2016; Crockett, 2015; England et al., 2011; Murnen et al., 2016; Thomas, 2009). Disney princess characters are some of the representative figures who entail traditional gender roles and behavior (Thomas, 2009). For some parents, Disney is the brand which reminds them of their childhood and this makes them feel Disney is a relatively 'safe' brand for children (Buckingham, n.d.). However, some critics noted that Disney is the brand which causes gender stereotyping,

commercialism, and sentimentality. England et al. (2011) analyzed the gender role portrayals of both princesses and princes in nine Disney films. Princesses in the recent films were more likely to pursue complex gender stereotypes compared to those from older films such as Snow White. They noted that Mulan and Belle (Beauty and the Beast) are equally brave to challenge traditional gender roles and jump into the adventure in the films. Elsa from the most recent Disney princess film Frozen is depicted as the most powerful princess in Disney films (Streiff & Dundes, 2017). However, it does not mean gender-typed roles and stereotypes are disappearing in Disney princess films. The process by which princesses achieve their goals is still often portrayed as emotional, uncontrollable, and fragile. Princesses always need someone's help, even from a sister. In addition, the appearance of Disney princesses also describes gender stereotypes; princesses still wear glittery dresses and slippers, which highlight princesses' physical attractiveness.

There are also studies which explored male gender-stereotypical representations of superhero characters. Miller, Rauch, and Kaplan (2016) showed that males were more powerful, muscular, violent, and independent whereas females were warm, seductive, helpless, and dependent in superhero stories. Different aspects were found regarding male and female special abilities and weapons. A male character's ability and weapons were more likely to cause damage while the female's weapons were more defensive and manipulative. Males' actions in the superhero's stories were also associated with another issue: 'violence', which may trigger aggressive behavior of children. Violence is a key term that makes superheroes more problematic (Alleyne, 2010). One exception may be the recent Marvel's film, Black Panther. The film portrayed powerful and positive female characters (Pennacchio, 2018). The audience of the movie, particularly female audiences, felt empowered by the female characters. Excluding a few

cases, popular stories of superheroes' stories display gender-typed behaviors in general. Gender roles are also highlighted in gender-typed toys. Auster and Mansbach (2012) analyzed Disney toys promoted on its website. They labelled each toy as 'boys only', 'girls only', or 'both boys' and girls'. Disney apparently promoted gender-typed toys for 'boys only' and 'girls only'. 'Boys only' toys included action toys, vehicles, and weapons while 'girls only' toys included dolls, beauty-related products (e.g., cosmetics, jewelry), and toys which featured domestic work. Disney is one of the frequently discussed licensed media entertainment brands with respect to gender (e.g., Thomas, 2009; Samakow, 2013).

Licensed media characters not only represent gender-typed values to children but may also significantly influence children's gender socialization. Coyne et al. (2016) tested the association between the level of Disney princess engagement and children's gender-typed behavior. Children's Disney princess engagement was measured by princess-related media habits, playing with toys, and princess identification. Female gender-typed behavior was found from both girls and boys who were highly engaged with Disney princesses. Out of interest, this effect remained when they re-assessed children's gender-typed behavior. Similar results were found with children's superhero engagement and male gender stereotypes and behavior. Coyne et al. (2014) recognized the limited studies examining the effect of superhero programs. Mothers of preschool children were recruited and asked about their children's engagement with superhero characters and plays. Results showed that a high level of superhero engagement was positively associated with male-stereotyped play for boys and weapon play both for girls and boys. This effect remained for a one-year period.

Racial Stereotypes Children do not only listen or read their favorite stories but also embrace and internalize the characteristics of characters in the stories. Engaging narratives

provide a vast opportunity for marketers to produce various media merchandise and amplify 'media character effects' through advertising. Race is also one of the important characteristics that impact children's socialization. Historically, people with lighter skin color have been considered more culturally acceptable (Matyas, 2010). This dominant standard of skin color has been cultivated within the media.

Racial minorities have often been ignored or not well-represented in media in general. Mastro (2017) examined a content analysis of portrayals of Black people in media such as television, films, and advertising. He noted that the number of Black representations has increased over the years. However, Black people were still substantially under-represented by various forms of media (e.g., depicted as aggressive and unemployed; wage disparities between White and Black). In Peruta and Powers's (2017) content analysis of television commercials on Nickelodeon, Asians, Hispanics, and other indigenous people were substantially under-represented whereas Black people featuring as lead characters increased compared to years ago. The previous literature addressed a lack of diversity in race and ethnic groups in media content, and advertisers and media content producers are encouraged to avoid controversy because of the erasure of characters' racial diversity.

There have been a few discussions about portrayals of media characters' racial stereotypes. Towbin et al. (2004) conducted a thematic analysis of twenty-six Disney animated movies to explore ideologies and stereotypes regarding gender, age, race, and other cultures. They found that some Disney films portrayed racial minorities (e.g., *Pocahontas*, *Peter Pan*, *Dumbo*) stereotypically negative. For instance, in *Dumbo*, Black workers were depicted as figures doing manual labor who are controlled by a White man. Here are the lyrics of the song that Black workers sing in the film: "We work all day, we work all night, we have no life to read

and write, we're happy…we don't know when we get our pay, and when we do, we throw our money away..." (Towbin et al., 2004, p. 32).

Matyas (2010) also examined textual analysis of Disney Princess films and analyzed the stereotypical representation of the characters. She also stated that 'the role of race is restricted' (p.13). Until the late 1990s, protagonists in Disney films were dominantly Europeans (Byrne & McQuillan, 1999). Non-Europeans were almost absent or under-represented. As more people care about diversity, equity and inclusion in children's education is becoming more important (UNESCO, 2017). Disney's classic shows and films which entail many stereotypical representations in gender and racial minorities have gained negative attention by the audience.

The erasure of race in media characters and prospective parental mediation was also discussed in Wohlwend and Hall (2016). Wohlwend and Hall (2016) addressed a need for critical engagement with diversity in the stories of media characters. They recognized the phenomenon of homogenization, which media cultivates through unified gender and racial representation, particularly in children's stories and media content. They explored the *Lalaloopsy* brand, which is one of the ragdoll brands released in 2010 by MGA Entertainment. *Lalaloopsy* characters' race is almost erased and not emphasized as an important value for children. There is a doll named *Mittens Fluff 'n' Stuff* who has light brown skin color, but she was featured as 'ambiguously raced doll.' Her unique racial identity was not even mentioned in *Lalaloopsy'*s website. Wohlwend and Hall concluded that parents and educators should understand the nature of transmedia technologies which encourage young children to "take up particular scripts as doll players, consumers, and boys or girls." (p.166) Also, they suggested critical engagement and creative media pedagogies of parents and teachers who could adopt critical scripting and collaborative play.

While racial issues have been examined with media characters' gender, little research has been released regarding parental mediation except for Wohlwend and Hall (2016). A limited body of literature regarding racial stereotypes in media characters provides few insights for parents and scholars who want to teach diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Health Childhood obesity has become one of the serious societal issues in the United States. According to The State of Obesity (October 2017), the recent data show that the U.S. childhood obesity rate is 18.5% on average. This rate has increased dramatically since the early 1970s. Scholars have highlighted the role of media on children's obesity and the overweight issue (e.g., Emond et al., 2015; Kraak & Story, 2015; Livingstone & Helsper, 2006; Roberto et al., 2010). They have studied children's consumption of fast food and other low-nutrient food marketing. Emond et al. (2015) found that parents of preschool-aged children (3-7 years) were more likely to visit fast food restaurants (e.g., McDonald's, Burger King) when their children watched one of the children's networks, which feature popular media characters (e.g., Nickelodeon, Nicktoons, Cartoon Network, and Disney). Children who collected toys from fast food restaurants were also more likely to request visits to fast food restaurants. Their study implies that aggressive food marketing using character-driven toys does attract young children to visit fast food restaurants. The attention then should be given to character marketing since toys provided from fast food restaurants are most often figures of media characters (Webley, 2010).

Advertising of unhealthy food packages emerged with branded toy marketing since the late 1980s and 1990s. McDonald's has been in the center of toy advertising due to its Happy Meal set menu, which provides toys as a premium. The Happy Meal was first introduced in 1979, but the beginning of its food marketing using toys began in 1987 when Disney toys debuted (Webley, 2010). The partnership between McDonald's and Disney was terminated due

to criticisms about health issues more than a decade ago. Recently, however, they reunited for a Happy Meal revamp and cross-promotion (Whitten, 2018). Through this collaboration, Disney announced that they will also redefine how food should be advertised to children and families.

Popular media characters are also featured as endorsers in children's food packages such as cereals and fruit snacks in addition to fast food. Elliott (2012) examined packages of regular foods (everyday edibles which are not categorized as junk food or fast food by consumers - e.g., fruits and vegetables, cheese, yogurts, cereals, snacks, etc.). Packages targeting young children included numerous fun factors such as crayoned fonts and cartoon images. One in five images were licensed media characters from *Shrek, SpongeBob SquarePants, Star Trek, Sesame Street, Disney, or Looney Tunes*. Elliott's study revealed the active collaboration between food companies and media character brands.

The endorser effect of tie-in media characters on children's behavior was also scientifically demonstrated in a handful of studies. Levin and Levin (2010) examined if brand names and licensed characters predict young children's food choice, product attitudes and purchase intention. Seven-to-eight-year-old children participated in the experiments by reviewing and evaluating the given stimuli of brand names, characters, and healthy and unhealthy food products. Licensed media characters significantly attracted more children to like the food package (higher ratings) when given unfamiliar brand names. This finding suggests that the endorser effect of characters is a powerful tool to appeal to young children. Similar results were found by Nelson, Duff and Ahn (2015). They conducted in-depth interviews with preschool-aged children to explore children's snack choices among product packages with different attributes (e.g., shape, taste, character, presence of fruit, etc.). When children were asked to choose their own snacks, all children selected the packages featuring *Super Mario* or

Dora the Explorer. The presence of media characters plays a significant role in children's decision making.

Roberto and her colleagues (2010) also tested children's taste preference and food choice. Their research highlighted the promising effect of using licensed characters to increase children's taste. Children's taste preference was significantly improved given unhealthy food such as gummy bears or crackers. This means, when competing with healthy food products, the effect of licensed characters is more powerful to promote less healthy food products. In a more recent study by Ogle et al. (2017), a food package with popular media characters drew more attention of young children compared to a plain package. Due to these powerful effects, some food companies have undergone scrutiny to limit employing licensed characters on unhealthy food packages (Levin & Levin, 2010).

More broadly, Kraak and Story (2015) provide a systematic review of scholarly work related to the use of brand mascots and licensed characters on children's cognitive, behavioral and health outcomes. They reviewed eleven experimental studies which were published from 2000 to 2014. Even though the stimuli and methods employed in the studies were heterogeneous, they revealed similar findings that Roberto and her colleagues (2010) found. Character familiarity was not a huge influencer affecting children's food preference or intake of healthy food. However, interestingly, familiar media characters were more likely to encourage young children to eat less healthy food compared to healthy food. The characters analyzed by the authors were generally licensed media characters (e.g., *Dora, SpongeBob, Sesame Street, Scooby Do, Shrek*, etc.). It is obvious that the use of media characters for unhealthy food products is still an ongoing issue, which critically affects children's food intake as well as their perception of food products.

The presence of licensed media characters influences even parents' food choices. Leonard, Campbell and Manning (2019) showed that a licensed media character on food packages is likely to be a determinant of both children's and parents' food package choice within the same product category. That is, children and parents were likely to select a food in a package with a licensed media character over the same type of food in a package without the character. Even though children's and parents' goals differ (selecting a healthier food option vs. tasty food), the appearance of a licensed media character was considered important for both groups.

Summary

The possible positive and negative outcomes of characters and content were reviewed. Scholars to date have examined such positive and negative effects in their research and assessed the possible impact on children's behaviors, product choices, literacy, consumption, stereotypes, or their health. A few studies addressed parents' understanding and perceptions of a major media and entertainment conglomerate, Disney, regarding educational value, gender, and commercial nature (Hubbard, 2017; Sørenssen, 2018). However, little is known of parents' perceptions or understanding of media character brands, especially related to advertainment content (covert advertising context). To what extent do parents understand the potential effects of media character content and merchandise? To what extent do their perceptions or attitudes influence their mediation style regarding advertainment displaying those characters? We still need a more systematic approach to understand how parents perceive popular media characters and how the perceptions could be associated with parental media literacy and mediation, particularly with respect to advertainment content. In the next section is a review of parent mediation.

Parental mediation practice

Parents have long been considered as one of the most important socializing agents for children (Connell et al., 2015; Nelson et al., 2017). Therefore, they are key partners in their children's media literacy. As Potter (2010) noted in his article, there is a natural intervention for children's media literacy, which is general training or education accomplished by family communication. As revealed in Moschis and Churchill's (1978) piece, family communication or parental influence is considered as one of the most important socialization forces. Therefore, scholars have examined parental mediation on children's consumption patterns, values, or knowledge related to the marketplace or advertising (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Nelson et al., 2017). Parental mediation refers to "the way parents teach children how to cope with media content and prevent negative consequences of media use on their psychological and mental health" (Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018, p. 199).

Parental Mediation Framework

In the 1980s, Carlson and Grossbart (1988) explored the association between parental style and consumer socialization of children. They noticed that child-parent interaction becomes an integral part of consumer socialization. They categorized parental styles primarily as authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and neglecting. Authoritative parents tend to communicate with their children in accordance with family rules and a certain degree of autonomy. Authoritarian parents are more likely to have restrictions and rules with hostility. Indulgent parents tend to be relatively warmer than authoritarian parents but more permissive. They are generally compliant and affirmative to children, which often negatively affects children's learning due to lack of guidance. Neglecting parents perform minimum guidance, which leads them to lose opportunities to communicate with children. Carlson and Grossbart (1988) found

out that authoritative parents are "most active in shaping learning experiences and discussing children's opinions" with respect to consumer communication and media habits. Authoritarian parents were likely to avoid discussing consumer matters and advertising. They expected that those parents are anxious about negative aspects of media communication and consumer acts - impulsive buying, materialism, and so on.

Three categories of parental mediation strategies were primarily discussed by scholars in the previous literature: active mediation, restrictive mediation, and co-viewing (Mendoza, 2009). Active mediation involves proactive parenting; it includes purposive discussions about positive and negative aspects of media content. Parents suggest educational media content which may enhance children's learning and critical thinking (positive active mediation). This strategy turned out to be effective in promoting socially desirable behavior (Nathanson, 2002). In other cases, parents discuss negative effects of media content and promote safe content watching (negative active mediation). Parents' interpretation of media content positively influences how children view and evaluate media content (Mendoza, 2009). Active mediation has been demonstrated as more effective than restrictive mediation to protect young children from undesirable media influences (e.g., Fujioka & Austin, 2003; Lwin, Stanaland, & Miyazaki, 2008; Shin, 2018). Fujioka and Austin (2003) noted that critical discussions with children may encourage them to learn critical thinking skills compared to rule-based restrictive mediation.

Restrictive mediation refers to parental engagement in children's media habits by limiting time or setting family rules and policies for media use. For instance, viewing rules may be enforced for television watching or playing video games, i.e., so-called "screen time". Also, parents partially employ this strategy for the programs which contain violence, sexual content, scary content, or any disapproved values and behaviors (Buckingham, 1993; St. Peters et al.,

1991). For children's safety regarding Internet use, parents often install blocking, filtering, or monitoring tools on devices (Mendoza, 2009). This strategy is more effectively employed for younger children with less cognitive ability to process media content by themselves. Such a high level of restrictive mediation may influence teenagers to elicit negative attitudes toward parental strict rules and might result in eliciting boomerang effects or may end up being less empowering for children to engage in healthy media habits (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Mendoza, 2009; Nathanson, 2002). Shin (2018) also noted that restriction mediation can produce boomerang effects.

Co-viewing refers to sharing media experience with children and parents together. In early studies, co-viewing was considered as 'unfocused mediation' or 'non-restrictive guidance' (Bybee, Robinson, Turow, 1982; Vittrup, 2009). Although co-viewing includes sharing media content with children, parents' active role may not be engaged during the media consumption. Recently, however, media co-viewing or co-engagement is discussed with social interaction (Strouse et al., 2013; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Parents can direct children's attention to important media content, retrieve children's previous media experience, or ask related questions with respect to co-viewing media content. However, reasons behind the coviewing behavior were not fully researched in previous studies. The purpose of the coviewing can be regulating age-inappropriate content (e.g., sex, violence) or enjoying the media experience together with children.

Primarily, parental mediation has been explored and discussed in various media contexts. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, scholars investigated parental mediation practice primarily for children's television viewing (e.g., Nathanson, 2002; Valkenburg et al., 1999; Walsh, Laczniak, & Carlson, 1998). Around the 2010s, literature was more skewed to parental mediation of

children's use of digital devices such as video games (e.g., Shin & Huh, 2011), the Internet (e.g., Livingstone & Helsper, 2008), and smartphones (e.g., Ko et al., 2015; Shin, 2018). Also, the child's age (younger) and negative perceptions toward the media (or related media content) were found to be significant antecedents which influence parental mediation (Haddon & Vincent, 2015; Hwang et al., 2017; Koh, 2014; Shin & Huh, 2011).

Also, there have been a wide range of studies examining parenting practice for advertising in multiple forms. Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) aimed to identify the most effective mediation strategy in reducing undesirable advertising effects. They found that active mediation and concept-oriented consumer communication (which emphasizes negotiations, discussions, and individuals' opinions) were the effective ways to mediate children's television advertising. Brand placements (integrated advertising), one form of advertainment content, was also discussed regarding parental mediation (Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018). Results of the study by Hudders and Cauberghe (2018) showed that restrictive mediation rather encouraged younger children (under 8) to possess positive attitudes toward the brand exposed in the given media content. Limiting exposure to persuasive episodes rather hindered young children from learning coping strategies. Restrictive mediation was relatively more effective for older children. In their study, active mediation was also not very effective to reduce brand attitudes. The authors inferred that children in the study (second grade) were too young to understand the nature of advertising. However, the qualitative study conducted by Nelson et al. (2017) showed that parental active involvement in teaching advertising could be helpful for young children (ages 3-5) to learn about advertising. This study also acknowledged the potential for positive effects of advertising among young children – the fun and entertainment effects. Previous literature shows that parental mediation of advertising should be executed more sophisticatedly by considering

various factors such as the child's age, child's advertising literacy, child's skepticism toward advertising, or advertising format (De Jans et al., 2017; De Pauw et al., 2018; Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018).

However, there is a lack of research on influencer marketing within the parental mediation framework. Although the literature about influencer marketing is emerging recently (e.g., Evans et al., 2017; Kim & Kim, 2018; Liang, Lee-Argyris, & Muqaddam, 2018), there has been a lack of attention on parents' understanding of child-targeted influencer marketing and parental mediation strategies for children. As noted in other advertainment literature (e.g., Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013; Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018), parents may be also confused with influencer marketing tactics which target young children. Sponsored unboxing videos are an example. As mentioned in the previous section, parents are confused with the newer form of advertising on YouTube channels (Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018). Parents are more sensitively mediating and controlling violent or sexual media content which may produce harmful effects on their children. Thus, parental mediation seemed to be less performed for unboxing videos, and these subtle advertising forms are less recognized as advertising.

In addition, recent research has shown that parents use positive active mediation for pre-school children's book reading, particularly for classic and educational books such as Dr. Seuss, Dora the Explorer, and Curious George (Ahn & Nelson, 2019). Ahn and Nelson (2019) found that many parents reported co-reading and actively discussing the content and characters featured in books. However, none of the studies discussed in this section have explored the potential for positive and negative effects and related discussions about advertising or media characters among parents and their children. This dissertation explores parental attitudes and mediation as a

whole, considering the potential for positive and negative effects of characters and advertising for children.

CHAPTER 3: FIRST STUDY - RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Positive and negative qualities of media characters

Thus far, I have reviewed possible positive and negative outcomes of media characters and related media content on children. The content includes television programs or games as well as advertainment content. In the previous studies, media characters' positive and negative effects on children's social and cognitive development have been examined and reviewed (e.g., Coyne et al., 2016; England et al., 2011). Disney Princess engagement turned out to be positively associated with female gender stereotypes (Coyne et al., 2016). When a child spends more time on Disney Princess plays and shows, s/he is more likely to have stereotypical views about females (e.g., girls should be pretty, girls should be calm, etc.). Also, many scholars, educators, and media columnists have discussed the potential negative influence of media characters (England et al., 2011; Miller, Rauch, & Kaplan, 2016; Thomas, 2009; Towbin et al., 2014). However, parents' perceptions about media characters have not been openly discussed in past research. When mediating programs, games, and other entertaining media content, which qualities of media characters are importantly considered by parents of preschool-aged children? Thus, this question was suggested as the first research question.

RQ1. What media characters' qualities are positively and negatively considered by parents?

Parental media literacy of advertainment containing popular media characters

Research is particularly lacking for exploring the extent of parents' understanding of the effects of advertainment which features media characters. We need a more rigorous approach to assess parents' media literacy to critically recognize and discuss to what extent parents are media literate with respect to advertainment using media characters. As discussed earlier, parents as

well as young children are less likely to recognize advertising intent from advertainment compared to traditional commercials (Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013). Scholars have examined children's or adults' persuasion knowledge or advertising literacy in advertising (e.g., Nelson,2016; Nelson et al., 2017), advergames (Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013; Reijmersdal et al., 2012), or sponsored content (e.g., Boerman et al., 2014, 2017). Nonetheless, we have a lack of studies exploring media literacy pertaining to advertainment displaying popular media characters in general. Thus, I suggest the following research question.

RQ2. What is the level of parents' media literacy regarding advertainment with popular child-friendly media characters?

Parental mediation of advertainment portraying media characters

I also discussed the parental mediation framework and empirical studies which examined different parental mediation practices in children's media use. Scholars have explored mediation strategies for children's television viewing, video games, computer, tablets, and so on (e.g., Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Mendoza, 2009; Shin, 2018; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Also, various forms of advertising have been discussed regarding parental mediation. However, we know little about how parents mediate advertainment content (e.g., advergames, unboxing videos) for their children.

Advertainment is appealing to young consumers and their parents, yet parents may need to think about and mediate these advertising attempts. There have been a few studies which added to existing literature on persuasion knowledge and parental mediation regarding advergames. Evans, Carlson, and Hoy (2013) explored how different types of parenting styles influence attitudes toward advergames. He also examined the relationship between parental Internet mediation and persuasion knowledge of children's advergames (Evans, 2014).

Pertaining to child-targeted unboxing videos, Hoy, Childers, and Evans (2018) also touched upon parents' understanding of sponsored child influencer videos. Such attention to advertainment is expected to contribute to media education and policy making (Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018).

Nonetheless, advertainment is a growing area which still needs more attention. Previous literature does not show how parents mediate advertainment or content that features popular media characters or consider any positive effects. Parents may have different mediation strategies for specific characters or specific types of advertainment content. Parents may use active mediation when they discuss Dora the Explorer or Thomas Friends while they may avoid talking about violent superhero characters and restrict their children from watching or playing at all with them (Ahn & Nelson, 2019). Thus, to fill the research gap, in the current study, I plan to explore various types of parental mediation practices of advertainment portraying media characters.

RQ3. What types of parental mediation are practiced by parents regarding advertainment content featuring child-friendly media characters?

Focus of the study: Parents of preschool-aged children

The focus of the dissertation was parents of children aged four to six. In previous literature, scholars have discussed parental mediation strategies across different age, socio-economic status, ethnic groups, and countries (e.g., Livingstone et al., 2017; Nikken & Opree, 2018; Valkenburg et al., 1999). However, studies pertaining to media literacy or advertising literacy were mainly focused on older children and adolescents (e.g., Donohue, Henke, & Donohue, 1980; Hudders, Cauberghe, & Panic, 2016; Jeong, Cho, & Hwang, 2012; McAlister & Cornwell, 2009; Nelson, 2016; Rozendaal et al., 2011). I selected parents of preschool-aged children as participants of my dissertation because children at preschool age are the main target

audience of media characters and merchandise. It is imperative to understand to what extent parents of preschool-aged children are able to process persuasive messages from various advertainment content and to what extent their parents mediate this content.

CHAPTER 4: FIRST STUDY (INTERVIEWS) - METHOD

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore parents' perceptions of various media characters, their knowledge of various forms of advertising/advertainment, and to learn how parents interact with their child about the various formats of media content. Interacting with parents at home enables researchers to better understand the daily lives of children including their media habits and playtime (Atkinson, Nelson, & Rademacher, 2015; Banister & Booth, 2005). Also, semi-constructed interviews allowed me to navigate research topics and insights more broadly (Fylan, 2005). Insights gathered from interview data were used for the experimental survey in the second study. Participants were recruited through the Child Development Lab at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Daycare Center at the Parkland College. Prior to recruiting participants, the study design and procedure were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois. The study confirmed that all methods for the interviews were in accordance with ethical standards for conducting research with human subjects (Protocol # 19056).

Also, a campus newsletter reaching faculty, students, and staff, University of Illinois E-Week, was also used to distribute the study information and recruit participants. Participants were Native or non-Native English-speaking parents of children aged four to six in the Midwestern region of the United States. Recruiting strategies attempted to recruit participants across various race/ethnicity and socio-economic status so a range of rich insights about parental media literacy and parental mediation could be discovered. Each interview with a parent took no longer than 60 minutes. Interviews were audio-recorded only after receiving parents' agreement. When parents were uncomfortable with audio-recoding, I only took notes during the interviews (one out of thirty-five parents). In total thirty-five interviews (22 mothers and 13 fathers) were

conducted at participants' homes. Participants who completed the interview received a $20 incentive. The study was open to both mothers and fathers since the study may discover gender differences in perceptions and mediation practices regarding advertainment and media characters (Warren, 2017).

Procedure

At the beginning of each interview, parents received a copy of a written consent form. They signed the consent form with their printed name and date. Then, I began with open-ended queries about their and their child's typical days such as, "Please tell me about you and your family" and "Please describe a typical weekday and weekend of your family" with probing questions for their child's media use (Atkinson et al., 2015). In addition to media use questions, parents also talked about their own and their children's most favorite and least favorite media characters. Then, they watched three short YouTube videos that exemplified a range of media forms featuring different media characters (Thomas Train commercial, Lego Marvel Superhero advergame, and JillianTube HD unboxing video in random order). After each video, parents were asked to discuss the purpose, source, target audience, techniques, and messages regarding the videos, which are the primary domains of media literacy (Arke & Primack, 2009; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Nelson, 2016). In addition, parents also discussed any mediation strategies. For example, they reported whether or how they limit related media content or talked about the content with their child. Discussion about advertising naturally occurred due to exposure to the Thomas Train toy TV commercial. For those who could not capture the persuasive intent of advertainment content, I provided a short debrief about the purpose of the study (i.e., the purpose of the study was to observe how parents understand different types of advertainment content

targeting children). At the end, parents filled out a sheet of paper asking their demographic information (e.g., age, gender, race, education, occupation, household income, and child's age and gender). I thanked the participants with a participation inventive of $20. After each interview was conducted, I wrote detailed notes and observations about the interview. See the full list of questions in the Appendix A.

Stimuli

In previous studies (Arke & Primack, 2009; Hobbs & Frost, 2003), different types of media content were used to measure media literacy: typically, "traditional" media such as TV, radio, and newspapers. However, Duran et al. (2008) used a video advertisement to assess participants' media literacy. Other advertising literacy studies used traditional video commercials (Hudders, Cauberghe, & Panic, 2016; Rozendaal et al., 2010), print ads (Nelson, 2016) or advergames (An et al., 2014; Hudders, Cauberghe, & Panic, 2016). The current study used the videos of an advergame, an unboxing video, and a traditional commercial, each featuring licensed characters. The inclusion of media content helped capture parents' (relatively) objective level of media literacy pertaining to advertainment. I compared parents' media literacy across different levels of integration between advertising and entertainment. The first video is *LEGO® Marvel Super Heroes Universe in Peril* advergame. The video includes game scenes and stories of Hulk, Iron Man, and Spider Man. This video was chosen since it portrays popular media characters (i.e., Marvel Superheroes) which invites the audience to engage in the new narratives. Since character promotion is formed with mobile games, parents are more likely to be confused about whether it is advertising or not. The entire video consists of various game scenes and scenarios. I selected a few games scenes and scenarios to make a trailer version.

Figure 4.1 Screenshot from *LEGO® Marvel Super Heroes Universe in Peril* advergame

The second video is one of the unboxing videos from JillianTube HD introducing *Disney Princess Toys*. In the video, Jillian, one of the popular child influencers, unpacks multiple *Disney Princess* dolls and playsets and shows. Jillian introduces 19 Disney Princess Toys throughout the 8-minute-video (See Table 4.1 for the list of toys introduced in the video). The video briefly does disclose that the video is sponsored by Hasbro, JAKKS Pacific, and Disney at the beginning of the video. Sponsorship was disclosed in both audio and video/print. This unboxing video was selected since it is one of the advertainment contents which blur the borderline between advertising and entertainment. This 8-minute-video was edited to a 2-minute-short video for the current study (https://youtu.be/KixaZ8M45d0). The shorter version includes an introduction of three sets of Disney Princess playsets and 11 Disney Princess Royal Shimmer Dolls (They were randomly selected for the study). The shorter video also contains the sponsorship disclosure at the beginning of the video.

Figure 4.2 Screenshot from *JillianTube HD Disney Princess Toy Party*

Last, a 30-second-traditional commercial featuring *Thomas Super Train Station Set* was selected as the third video (https://youtu.be/KixaZ8M45d0). It includes scenes of young children excited with the train set. The advertisement also includes a few scenes from *Thomas and Friends* television episodes to make the ad more vivid and alive. This ad shows the obvious purpose of advertiser and target audience.

Disney Princess Bell Tiara
Disney Princess Bell Dress
Disney Princess Bell Musical Tea Party Cart
Disney Princess Magical Wand Cinderella
Disney Princess Rapunzel's Royal Ribbon Salon
Disney Princess Ariel's Royal Ribbon Salon
Disney Princess Rapunzel's Activity Time
11 Disney Princess Royal Shimmer Dolls (Pocahontas, Aurora, Merida, Bell, Jasmine, Tiana, Snow White, Cinderella, Ariel, Mulan, and Rapunzel)
Disney Beauty and the Beast 25th Anniversary edition book and DVD
* Note: Among total 19 toy and related playsets, 14 items above (bold) were introduced in the edited version.

Table 4.1 A list of toys introduced in the JillianTube HD video

Figure 4.3 Screenshot from *Thomas Super Train Station Set* commercial

These three videos were shown to all participants in the interviews in random order. The reason of randomization is to observe if the order makes a difference in recognizing advertainment content. Three videos with different levels of integration of advertising and entertainment allowed me to understand each parent's understanding and perceptions of various advertising formats. Each video did not take more than 2 minutes.

Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed. In total, about 2,089 minutes (34 hours and 48 minutes) of interviews were recorded. For data analysis, interview transcripts were combined with the notes obtained from each interview. I used grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with both inductive and deductive approaches with my research questions in mind. Emerging themes about parents' perceptions about media characters, understanding of advertainment content, and their mediation strategies were captured. This iterative process was continued to identify if the emerging themes can be classified as recurring patterns. With descriptive coding, a series of themes were revealed with "meticulous analytic attention" (Saldaña, 2013). To analyze the media literacy of parents in the interviews, the study referred to previous literature about media literacy (e.g., Duran et al., 2008) and parental mediation (e.g., Ahn and Nelson, 2019; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Valkenburg et al., 1999).

To see a broader picture of parents' responses from interviews, participants' quotes and opinions were color coded with sticky notes. Blue color notes show characters which parents like and dislike. Yellow color notes were related to children's media habits (i.e., children's use of YouTube, Netflix, Amazon prime). Pink color notes indicated how parents responded to the three advertising videos.

Also, parents were categorized into groups based on their demographics (e.g., age, income). According to previous studies, parents' gender, education, and income may influence parental mediation of children's media use (Anderson 2016; Paus-Hasebrink, Bauwens, Durager and Ponte 2013; Warren 2017). Anderson (2016) found that U.S. mothers were more likely to frequently talk about online etiquette and other appropriate behaviors with teens compared to

fathers. Paus-Hasebrink et al. (2013) also found that parents' socioeconomic status was a key determinant of active and restrictive mediation of children's internet use. Thus, the following parent groups were created, analyzed, and compared: low-income mothers, low-income fathers, middle/high income mothers, and middle/high income fathers. The process of creating categories with sticky notes allowed me to move around the data and "see" patterns emerging. See the analysis with sticky notes from Figure 4.4.

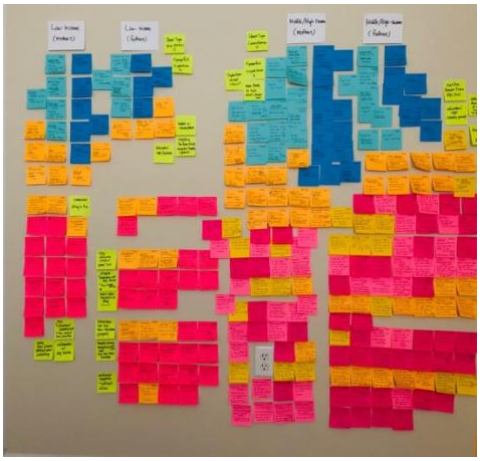

Figure 4.4 Analyzing interviews with sticky notes

CHAPTER 5: FIRST STUDY (INTERVIEWS) - FINDINGS

Participant information

Out of 35 parents, 22 mothers and 13 fathers participated in the one-to-one interviews. The range of annual household income varied by parents (from less than $25,000 to more than $150,000). Parents from low-income families and middle/high-income families were assessed based on their annual income and total household members (Oh, 2017). According to the county income range, 10 low-income families and 25 middle/high-income families were identified. See Appendix B for more details about interviewee information. Also, all related participants' excerpts are listed in Appendix C.

Parents' positive and negative perceptions toward media characters

To see how parents differently perceive advertainment content of positive and negative characters, I explored several qualities of media characters that parents cared about. Parents were asked about their most favorite and least favorite media characters and programs. They were also asked to explain what characteristics they like and dislike about the characters. There were no emerging differences in parents' liking and disliking of characters between parent groups (parent gender, income). Frequent descriptors showing positive and negative qualities of media characters are listed in Table 5.1.

Positive qualities of media characters	Negative qualities of media characters
Educational (good message)	Violent (fighting, smashing, hurting)
Innocent, childlike	Getting away from reality
Learning (e.g., numbers, animals, emotions)	Too noisy (whinny voice)
Friendship	Prejudice and stereotypes
Teamwork	Propaganda
Helping	Crude (adult) humor
Sentimentality	Mean behavior
Age-appropriate	Sexual content
Problem solving	Only caring about how a person looks
Wholesome	Scary content
Not violent or scary	Showing wrong resolutions

Table 5.1 Word clouds: Positive and negative qualities of media characters

Parents' favorite characters were associated with innocence, learning, and prosocial messages

When parents were asked about media characters they like, characters from PBS Kids programs were frequently mentioned in the interviews. Daniel Tiger and Curious George were popular for both parents and their children. Parents believed that Daniel Tiger characters and the program help children's social and emotional development. For example, Ariana explained, "He would always make sure that children understood that there is diversity and that, I guess Daniel Tiger, there are some episodes where he always says it's ok to be upset, but you can express your feelings. It's okay to be scared. I think there is one Daniel Tiger episode where he's going off to school for the first time and he is a little apprehensive about that and it's okay to be that way but understand that your Mom is always going to come back so it's not, she's not leaving me forever. So, Pearl and I watched that right before she started preschool."

Parents also commonly perceived Curious George as kid-like and innocent. Sharing, exploring, and problem-solving were shared characteristics that parents liked about Curious George. Anna shared her perceptions, "I think he's kid-like, but still innocent, kind of for them. And he does kid things like slightly, things that maybe he would make a mess or shouldn't be doing. But then there's usually like they talk about it in the show, our kids will be learning through Curious George when he goes in the kitchen and tries to do something himself that he can't do, then, makes a big mess. That's also something that could happen."

Finally, Paw Patrol, a Nick Jr. program, was also positively assessed by parents. They loved how the characters in the program do teamwork and help other people. Mel noted, "On the front when they first advertise it says teamwork, positive attitude and what else did it say? It has a whole list of what they said. Teamwork, it depends on the show because a lot of times, at the beginning of the show, they'll tell you exactly what they're going to say. So, when you download,

you go to Disney Jr. or Nickelodeon Jr., you'll see it before the show comes out. It'll say, oh, we're doing teamwork, we're doing positive attitude, and we're practicing blah, blah, blah. So, there's a lot of lists on there what they're doing." She uses program content information provided by from the Nick Jr. website when pre-evaluating programs for her daughter.

Parents' least favorite characters were associated with violent, unrealistic, child-unfriendly messages

On the other hand, parents evaluated some superhero characters and the characters and show of SpongeBob SquarePants somewhat negatively. Violence and fantasy were the main reasons of dislike of the characters. Parents believed that their pre-school children were too young to watch superhero-related shows and movies while they can read superhero story books. One parent acknowledged the goodness of the superhero series, but she thought her children are not ready yet for superhero characters. Katherine shared, "Of course, the idea of superheroes is great, but it's, you know, the traditional superheroes, women are scantily clad, and magically from head to toe show their chin, that's little difficult like, I love Wonder Woman, several things on my desk, but sometimes, yeah, superhero hi though, Wonder Woman wears leggings, the boots. She is covered, Wonder Woman is covered, not like bikini, um, strapless swimming suit, but a lot of it is not appropriate for her, like a lot of the movies out now, Black Panther, great movie, but she is not quite in a right age for that." Parents did not positively view how the characters in SpongeBob SquarePants treat each other and share adult jokes. They also did not like fast-paced shows which are too overwhelming for young children. One parent, Yvette, talked about her personal experience watching SpongeBob episodes. "During our trip, we went to DC a couple of months ago, to visit friends and family, and then, we went to a hotel and he watched SpongeBob, which is really awful and really violent, so, Chris kept saying it's funny, no

Chris, it's not funny, it's violent, that part, SpongeBob's brain popped out …it was not age-appropriate at all, but he really wanted to watch it." There were not many differences in character likes and dislikes between mothers and fathers. Also, parents' occupations, education, and income level did not appear to be related to their character evaluations, at least no clear patterns emerged from these data.

Parents' responses to the three types of advertisements

The second research question asks about parents' media literacy regarding advertainment which portrays media characters (or related merchandise). Thus, I compared how parents responded to the three different advertisements: Thomas Train Toy set television commercial, JillianTube HD toy unboxing video, and Lego Marvel Superhero advergame. Parents' responses were analyzed and interpreted with respect to the purpose of the ad, production techniques driving children's attention, and their perceptions toward the ad. Messages and values of the ad and omitted information were expected to be obtained when I asked their overall assessment of the ad.

1. Traditional television advertisements

Parents' clearly identifying and understanding traditional television advertisements

After watching the Thomas Train toy set commercial, all the parents in the interviews clearly noticed it as an advertisement. Without any exception, parents easily explained about the production techniques used in the Thomas Train commercial without any problem. Parents described that the child's happy and surprising faces, the size of the toy, and inclusion of the Thomas Train animation scenes in the ad will make children want the toy. Also, fast-paced scene changes and the adult's obtrusive exciting voice introducing Thomas Train toy set were also

selected as techniques which attract child audiences. Such parents' interpretation of the advertisement shows their sophisticated understanding of persuasion tactics used in traditional advertisements, meaning their adequate level of persuasion knowledge or media literacy (Arke & Primack, 2009; Friestad & Wright, 2005; Primack et al., 2006).

Parents' not bad vs. positive attitudes toward traditional television advertisements

However, parents' attitudes toward traditional advertisements were divided into two views: not bad vs. positive. Several parents did not have any problem with traditional television advertisements but tried to avoid them since their children may keep requesting to purchase the products featured in the commercials. Aimee noted, "I think it's innocent. I think the way that they did it makes anybody want to buy it, especially a child. Definitely nothing to where it is alarming of any kind. I just feel like any age could watch that video (Thomas Train toy set commercial)." That was the main reason of subscribing to online streaming services. Parents also perceived YouTube ads similar to television advertisements because they can avoid them as much as they want (e.g., can skip ads on YouTube).

However, at least two parents talked about advertising positively. They believed that advertising in general enables children to obtain ideas for new toys and stories, which may affect children's play. For example, Nam asserts, "Children can learn something from ads. It gives more ideas to think than regular programs; help create a story." And Adele says, "It (Thomas Train toy set commercial) also gives the kids some idea or build things and try to play with other kids (good)." In the previous literature, a majority of scholars focused on negative consequences of advertising and studied how parents should mediate the content and negotiate with their children (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003, 2005; Crosby & Grossbart, 1984; Dens, De Pelsmacker, & Eagle, 2007). However, as Atkinson, Nelson, and Rademacher (2015)

underscored, advertising may help young children train themselves as wise consumers. Learning about the value of money and consumer experience can be interpreted as 'prosocial consumer outcomes.' The present study showed other ways children can learn from commercials.

Another reason for parents' relatively positive attitudes toward traditional advertisements is because the selling intent is more obvious compared with other non-traditional advertisements on social media or games. Parents expressed their concerns about evolving advertising and marketing techniques, which approach young children in subtle and entertaining ways; this will be discussed further in the next section.

2. Sponsored toy unboxing video

Identifying the persuasive intent: Parenting recognizing the unboxing video as 'commercial'

Most parents perceived the sponsored toy unboxing video as an advertisement. Parents also noted that a series of licensed toy collectibles, Jillian's excitement, and her demonstration were likely to attract their children's attention. Curtis explained, "I think of my daughter like she likes the princess dresses. She got a little Goodwill. It's Anna, but she has Elsa's dress on. I don't know what she calls her, but you know, for the language of the pretty and what they're wearing, and she'll see them at the store sometimes." Also, when they were asked about the purpose of the video, their common response was 'to sell products', 'make money', 'pure advertisement', and 'sneakier commercial'. Calvin argued, "That sponsored piece of propaganda that we just watched. Because it just clearly is, clearly the maker of those dolls is sponsoring." Tom also believed that the JillianTube unboxing video is an advertisement 'for sure'. This finding is corroborated by Hoy, Childers and Evans (2018) who studied parents' understanding of sponsored child influencer's videos. In their study, parents were also able to declare the selling

intent of the unboxing videos by showing a variety of responses like ‘a pitch’, ‘a commercial’, or ‘ways to make kids want more toys’.

There were a few cues that parents used to notice the persuasive intent of the video. Some parents already knew the girl featured in the video or experienced similar types of unboxing videos. Even though they were not familiar with the specific video, they inferred the selling intent from Jillian’s explanation about batteries for new toys (e.g., “it requires three double-A batteries that are not included”) and her scripted talk (e.g., “it’s too scripted”). Other parents described how Jillian demonstrating all the toys to the audience makes the video attractive to children. They noted that toy unboxing videos still convey the same commercial messages as television advertisements do. However, showing toys as a big collection and conveying a message that ‘you should have all of these toys’ were something they haven’t seen in traditional commercials.

Although parents mostly recognized the video’s selling intent, very few parents clearly explained how unboxing videos work as a commercial. Not all of the parents clearly understood who is behind the scene and how advertisers pay child influencers. Other abstract purposes of the video were described as to drive followers and clicks, express their opinions, and earn advertising dollars.

Parents’ negative attitudes toward the toy unboxing video compared to traditional video advertising

Parents relatively responded to the sponsored toy unboxing videos negatively compared to traditional video advertisements. They showed their concerns about this sneakier way of exposing all toys in an attractive way in the unboxing video. They noted that the video provides no value or educational benefit but rather instigates children’s desire to ‘acquire’ all the toys they

see from the video, not to play with them, which indicates that the whole point of them is consumerism. One father, William, shared his experience with unboxing videos showing Shoppkins toys. He found that his daughter ended up unwrapping the toy as child influencers do in their videos and immediately put it aside. William worried that those videos might make her want more toys without any purpose. This type of unboxing video raises the level of ADD consumer culture, where we are encouraged to have new things again and again (Semuels, 2018).

Parents expected that the video will also make their children compare themselves with Jillian in the video because the video shows all different types of Disney princess toy sets which most child audiences do not usually have. Many preschool-aged children's product preference or loyalty are influenced by their peers (Easterling, Miller, Weinberger, 1995) since they increasingly spend time with their peers at a daycare center or a preschool. When all the peers have and talk about a certain toy, then the child may also want to have it. When a child sees that another child who just looks like his or her age playing with all the cool toys in the video, then it is inevitable to avoid the child's purchase request.

Interestingly, middle- and high-income parents expressed negative attitudes toward the toy unboxing video more than low-income parents did. About half of the parents from low-income households indicated that television commercials are worse than toy unboxing videos. One of the reasons is because traditional commercials are too flashy and use more exaggerated claims than unboxing videos. Also, they believed that the toy demonstration of child influencers is much more credible than commercials filled with glamour production techniques. Wilson noted, "The video is saying like, 'you want to have the same experience?'" Also, there was one parent, Robert, who did not like the unboxing video not because of the subtle commercial nature, but amateur video production skills and boring unboxing without any action and play. One dad,

Calvin, changed his attitude to negative after noticing the inserted sponsorship disclosure 'this is an ad for Hasbro, Jakks Pacific, and Disney'. Previous literature showed that income and advertising skepticism or negative attitudes are not correlated (e.g., Yaylagul and Cakir 2017). The current study might obtain different research findings because middle- or high-income parents may have more time to do research on media and advertising trends. Two parents, Yvette and William, mentioned that they search useful education sources from Common Sense Media where media experts and scholars provide advice and recommendations for children's media education. The finding also suggests the importance of clear and conspicuous sponsorship disclosure on sponsored videos to inform at least parent audiences about the persuasive intent so that their attitudinal persuasion knowledge can be activated (Boerman, van Reijmersdal, & Neijens, 2012).

Parents' liking of videos which encourage child's play

Out of interest, a few parents noted that unboxing videos can be acceptable or exciting if the videos include child's playing. Parents wished that videos could provide ideas to let their children play creatively or craft something interesting out of the video. Frank explained, "If this is an advertisement, it is not a good one. I think this is like Ryan's YouTube stuff but it's more boring than Ryan's YouTube stuff." William also shared his experience about educational YouTube videos, "I like the YouTube videos which make my children learn and play. My daughter and wife watched videos about rubber bands one day. They had fun time making rubber bands together. I would accept that." A survey conducted by The Joan Ganz Cooney Center (2014) shows how much parents care about educational media. In their survey, young children aged around 2-7 years old were likely to watch educational TV content for an hour an average. Parents responded that children can learn reading, cognitive and social skills, and art/culture.

This report suggests that parents always seek 'educational' media content where children can learn and grow cognitively and socially.

3. Advergame

Fewer parents noticing the persuasive intent of character advergame

In contrast to the toy unboxing video, 15 out of 35 parents could not recognize the Lego Marvel Game as an advertisement. Regardless of their income or education level, parents guessed that the game was primarily for entertainment, fun, or to learn teamwork and competition. Parents paid attention to the Lego superhero characters and the narratives in the game. They were more likely to talk about fighting and smashing behavior in the game rather than advertising. The other 10 parents clearly mentioned the advertising intent of Marvel and Lego to a young audience (e.g., "I think they made it because they wanted to cash in on the popularity of superheroes and Legos."). They understood the systematic character franchise via multiple platforms such as games, movies, and books.

The integration of game and advertising is confused by parents. Without a clear sponsorship disclosure, it is not an easy task for parents to activate their persuasion knowledge and cope with advergames (Evans & Hoy, 2016). Evans, Carlson, and Hoy (2013) discovered that parents tend to overgeneralize the concept of advergames because they were 'hypervigilant' to child-themed cues such as Hasbro and Disney. However, in the current study, without any descriptions about advertising, parents ignored the nature of Lego and Marvel's persuasive intent of promoting characters, but rather focused on the content of the game itself. Parents were more likely to discuss the format of the game and what children can learn from it. When observing smashing and fighting behavior in the game, several parents immediately showed concern about how the game might negatively affect their children's aggressive behavior. If the game content is

positive and enables children to learn something, then parents might consider the game as educational media. See Table 5.2.

Traditional television advertisement	Sponsored toy unboxing video	Advergame
Advertisement	More subtle advertisement Sponsored content Product promotion Drive advertising dollars Increase subscribers/followers To show how each different toy works Promote toys from their parents' toy store To attract toy companies	Learning teamwork Not sure Entertainment purpose Does not feel like an advertisement Bring adults' movies to kids' view Team building and earning points

Table 5.2 Participants' perceived intent of three types of advertising

However, all the parents selected familiar licensed characters (i.e., Lego, Marvel superheroes) as content features attracting children's attention. Especially, parents with sons shared their experience that they previously watched the Lego Movie, Lego Batman Movie, or read superhero books with their children together. James noted, "There are a lot of very popular characters that they can then also go to Walmart and get a t-shirt or backpack with that and see them in the movie theater. So, it would probably be pretty good for that. I know Cassie knows some of those characters. So, if she saw them, she probably be like, 'Oh, I know that one that's Batman.'" Anna also shared, "Yeah. And we read books that we get from the library. My husband and I watch the adult Marvel movies that come out, and they know that." In other cases, a child already has similar video games featuring Lego superheroes. Curtis mentioned about his son's Lego Dimensions, "I think the only thing that we owned was that Lego Dimensions, which I think it might have included in one of the extras, the Marvel characters." This shows that familiar media characters do work as a powerful means of capturing children's attention.

Parental Mediation

1. Traditional television advertisements

The third research question inquired to what extent parents mediate advertainment content displaying media characters. Parental mediation was explored for general advertising (e.g., such as Thomas Train toy set television commercial), JillianTube HD toy unboxing video, and the Lego Marvel Superhero advergame.

Parental mediation of children's purchase request: Save and wait

When parents were asked about how they interact about advertising with their children, all the parents shared their mediation strategies for children's purchase request behavior. Their first strategy is delaying children's impulse buying by making a birthday/Christmas list. Birthday and Christmas were considered as 'big gift' days. Thomas explained, "I usually say, I cannot promise, but you can put it on the list for your birthday or Christmas." When children ask to purchase new toys, one third of parents tell children that they cannot always have everything they want and suggest them using a birthday or Christmas gift list. Parents also cautiously observe which toys that their children seriously like or not. A few parents mentioned that their children forget what they asked for right away and that is the sign that their children are not interested in that toy. In other regular days, no toys were allowed, or only small toys can be purchased when children behave nicely or do chores at home. Two parents use piggy banks so that children can save money for new toys. April talked about saving money, "If there is a toy she wants, then she needs to save money by getting it from errands. This is to stop impulsive buying."

In the previous advertising-related literature, parental mediation was discussed only with advertising exposure or its selling intent. Parental restrictive mediation was limitedly defined as

"sheltering children from advertising by reducing their exposure to it" (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005, p. 154). In a broader sense, restrictive mediation refers to parents' setting rules to control children's media use in terms of content appropriateness and a total amount of media exposure (Shin, Huh, & Faber, 2012). Active mediation also involves deliberately commenting on the nature and persuasive intent of advertising to children (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005). The intention of parental advertising mediation was discussed to 'counteract to undesirable advertising effects on children' (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005, p. 153). In other words, the main role of parental mediation was to inform children about advertising and let children think about persuasive messages.

Past studies noted that advertising is a key cause of child's pestering or purchase request (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003, 2005; Moschis & Churchill, 1978), and parental mediation could curtail the amount of request. Pestering was frequently discussed within parent-child consumer communication or family conflict (McDermott et al., 2006). Little has been discussed in the literature regarding parental mediation, pestering, and advertising. Cornish (2014) also strongly suggested that it is essential to look at mediation strategies weakening the relationship between advertising exposure and pestering or materialism. One study by Atkinson, Nelson, and Rademacher (2015) enriched the research gap by connecting financial literacy and children's consumer education. By consumer experience, children could identify the value or dollar as well as how to practically use and save for future consumption. However, their interpretation did not link the parental mediation of child's pestering and parental advertising mediation. Parental advertising mediation was separately explored for parental 'request' mediation.

As a socializing agent, parents play roles not only as consumer educator and information mediator (e.g., encouraging children to *think* about advertising intent and claims) but also as

'countervailing force' (e.g., denying purchase requests) (Wackman, 1979 cited from Wilman, 1983, p. 12). These roles are all associated with enhancing children's persuasion knowledge or advertising literacy. Thus, as a reaction to children's requests, delaying children's purchase and training them from impulsive buying can be interpreted as parental advertising mediation. This strategy features both restrictive and active mediation because it helps children tolerate deferred gratification coming from impulsive buying but also teaches them how to become wise consumers. Accordingly, the first study suggests that these two types of mediations are closely related. It is worthwhile expanding the range of parental advertising mediation.

Parental advertising mediation: Restrictive mediation

Another frequently employed parental advertising mediation is restrictive mediation. When asked about their children's exposure to advertisements in their daily lives, many parents explained that their children are limitedly exposed to television commercials since they use predominately online streaming services to watch television programs and movies such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. Parents chose to cut the cord because they want to intentionally or unintentionally avoid advertising exposure at least at home (Nelson et al., 2017). However, as Nelson et al. (2017) described, advertising avoidance might inhibit children from learning consumer experience.

Another way of restrictive mediation is to watch the public broadcast, PBS Kids channel. Parents showed a certain level of trust of PBS Kids because they believe the channel features fewer commercials than other cable television channels. They mentioned that program commercials show up but fewer brands appear during advertising break. Timothy shared, "PBS channel has limited commercials. It is pretty safe channel to watch". Thus, parents only limited

the amount of time watching programs, but generally did not have content restrictions on PBS Kids.

Parental advertising mediation: Active mediation

Four participants indicated that they are also likely to talk about advertising with their children. They emphasize that the purpose of the advertising is to sell products and get their children's attention. Also, they explain that advertisements are not a part of the programs/shows. Some parents underscored what is behind advertisements. They talk about how actual products do not always look as good as advertisements show. These parents wanted their children to naturally learn about advertisements in their daily lives and train them to become good and critical consumers. One parent, Mary, highlighted early education about media to their children: "Early education may enable my child to handle and adapt to advertising. We want to be more open." Anna also shared, "We say this is just to get you to want to buy or participate in or watch something, like it's not entertainment like the show that we're watching or the game or whatever." According to previous literature, this type of mediation style is active mediation (Mendoza, 2009). As noted above, parents' comments on advertising's gimmicks on reality and the commercial nature of advertising were demonstrated to be effective in diminishing children's materialistic attitudes (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003, 2005; Chakroff, 2007). From their deliberate attempt to start conversations about advertising and marketing, an adequate level of parents' critical media literacy was observed, at least among these parents (Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2011; Koc & Barut, 2016). Their critical understanding of advertising messages gradually enabled them to have a good sense of judgment in consumer experience, but also to share the knowledge with their children. Parents' lack of awareness of advertising might lead to neglect and silence to detrimental effect of advertising on children (Rasmussen et al., 2016). However,

overall, there were fewer parents who indicated that they actively talk about advertising with their children compared to parents using a *wait and save* strategy.

2. Sponsored toy unboxing video

Restrictive mediation: Content restriction on toy unboxing videos

A majority of parents mentioned that they will not allow their children to watch the unboxing video, which is restrictive mediation strategy (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Mendoza, 2009). They believed that the video will make their children want more new toys which they do not need. It was the same reason why parents try to avoid commercials on television. Regarding the toys request, parents used the same strategy for general advertising (e.g., 'save and wait' strategy). This finding shows opposite findings from Hoy, Childers and Evans (2018) who found that parents perceived viewing toy unboxing videos somewhat positively. In their study, parents did not perceive any problematic qualities such as violence or sexuality from unboxing videos. However, in the current interview study, most parents declared that they will not allow them to show this type of unboxing videos because their children will 'definitely' request the toys. Anna describes her opinion about the unboxing video, "I would not let my kids watch them because then like I said they're effective so, they would be asking for all of the things." Instead, several parents naturally distracted their children with alternative educational videos, shows or books. Mary said, "I don't see any value in the video, so let's watch something else." The reason is because parents knew that saying 'no' with authority will drive more attention to the video. Jenny talked about the same strategy. "I'll just tell her, okay… if I say 'no' to her, then she will say like, 'why!'" This passive restrictive mediation was also found from Ahn and Nelson's (2019) parental mediation of media character books. When parents were not fond of a particular

book, they did not like to discourage their children's reading by saying 'no' but rather suggested alternative books which their children can read.

Coviewing: Parents with positive attitudes toward the video

The parents who somewhat positively viewed the unboxing videos were more likely to watch the video together with their children (Nikken & Jansz, 2006). In the previous literature, this strategy was defined as 'coviewing' (Valkenburg et al., 1999; Shin & Huh, 2011). Reflective of Valkenburg et al. (1999), the underlying assumption of their coviewing construct may be parents' positive attitudes toward the program. Their coviewing items included: 1) watching together because a parent and a child both like a program, 2) watch together because of a common interest in a program, 3) watch together just for fun, 4) watch parents' program together, and 5) laugh with a child about things a parent sees on TV. These items indirectly indicate that the aim of coviewing is to enjoy media experience 'together' with a child. While parents coview the content, they were likely to talk about the characters, stories, and toys or ask questions about how their children think about the videos. Mel shared, "I will talk about Disney Princess movies and go over every doll in the video. I would ask, 'who was it? How did the Cinderella toy do?'" These conversations about the video were somewhat motivating but superficial ('light' degree of conversations to enjoy the content together with children).

Also, the parents whose strategy is coviewing were familiar with toy unboxing videos. Their positive previous viewing experience was likely to be related to their mediation strategies. When they enjoyed the media content and did have few child's requests, parents might be more likely to be open to the content. Victoria explained, "When my son was five, we watched the videos for fun. Unboxing videos are fun, EvanTube, they do fun things as a family. We tried out some of them. The videos help me know what toys she needs to purchase. The videos show

whether the toys are beneficial to kids." Nam also talked about her unboxing video experience in her home country, "I am familiar with this type of toy unboxing videos. When we were in Korea, my sons used to watch those videos featuring Turning Mecard robots. The videos introduced new toys and showed how to build up new stories with those toys. Children expect new episodes, new characters and think like, maybe there is something else that I don't know…We watched the videos together, no YouTube is allowed without mom."

Active mediation: Parents seeking opportunities to teach their children via the unboxing video

The second type of active mediation included explanations about the nature of unboxing videos. Parents were likely to explain that the child in the video is simply *showing* the toys. Some parents described that Jillian in the video does not actually have all those toys from their parents, but from toy stores. Other parents have discussions about how those videos teach and interest their children (e.g., 'what are you learning from the video?'). Jenna emphasized being thankful about the toys their children have at home should be always reminded. "But you have all of them already, the choice for you is having thankfulness." Betty also shared, "When my son asks too much (after watching the video), we will have discussions about consumerism." This mediation style is the same strategy that parents use for general television advertisements. The second type of active mediation was more performed by parents who negatively perceive unboxing video content. This finding was corroborated by other parental mediation research (Buijzen, 2003, 2005; Mendoza, 2009; Nelson et al., 2017),

3. Advergame

Restrictive mediation: 'Still too young for my children'

In the case of the superhero advergame, almost two thirds of the parents negatively assessed the game due to fighting and smashing behavior of the characters in the game. Parents

recognized superhero characters in the game and expected that their children may like it. However, parents expressed concern about their children's behavior after watching or playing the game. Some parents do not allow any video games because they already experienced their children's aggressiveness after playing the game. Nam explained, "I kind of don't like playing games because I see a clear difference between pre- and post-behavior." Interviewees responded that they will tell their children to wait until they get older or suggest other alternative options to play. Timothy declared, "I will not allow my children to play this smashing game, maybe I'll let them play when they become 10 years old?" By restricting the access to this type of game, they wanted to protect their young children from harmful media content (i.e., restrictive mediation).

Previous studies confirmed the findings of this first study. Nikken and Jansz (2006) and Schaan and Melzer (2015) discovered parents applying more restrictive mediation when they fear about the negative behavioral consequences of gaming. Detrimental effects of media content, particularly aggression and fright, were a strong predictor of restrictive mediation (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Before considering the nature of the commercial, parents sensitively respond to violence and fright factors from the game and this might drive them to avoid the game.

Active mediation: Talking about game's violence and being not real

On the other hand, there were some parents using active mediation regarding the advergame. They noted that *explaining* about violence is the key. Also, for children who might get scared of the characters' behavior, parents said they will explain the game is not real. One parent mentioned that they do not need to watch the video because it is not good and fun. By showing their negative perspectives about the game, parents attempted to have conversations about the game proactively, about mean behaviors and words. Adele noted, "I would try to

explain it maybe in my way, like, destroying things is not the best way to solve the problem." Jenny also shared, "I always emphasize, no bad words, use 'don't like' it than 'hate' it." However, out of interest, active mediation was usually combined with co-viewing or restrictive mediation. Some parents noted that they will talk about hitting while they watch how their child reacts to the game. On the other hand, some parents said they will talk about their negative attitudes toward the game and recommend other play or tell them to wait until they get older. This research shows that more than one type of parental mediation does occur when mediating certain media content (Abanto 2004; Dens, De Pelsmacker, & Eagle, 2007; Valkenburg et al., 1999).

Among the parents who talked about their active mediation, *none* of them provided any cues about advertising. When it comes to playing games, again, parents tend to think about appropriateness of the game content and whether it is educational or harmful. Even though some of the parents recognized the persuasive intent of the game, their mediation was more focused on the game itself.

Summary

The first study yielded diverse parental mediation strategies which parents (may) employ for advertainment portraying well-known media characters. Also, it provides an idea to what extent parents can understand and analyze not only traditional advertisements but also newer forms of advertising. See Table 5.3 for a summary of key themes. Some findings were corroborated by the previous literature while new insights about parental mediation approach were also captured, which are discussed in the next chapter.

Media characters

Positive qualities: Innocence, childlike, learning, and prosocial messages

Negative qualities: Violent, unrealistic, child-unfriendly messages

Selling intent/techniques

Parents clearly understand selling intent and persuasive techniques of traditional advertisements.

Parents were somewhat confused with advergame's purpose and techniques.

Primary media characters featured in three types of advertisements were selected as one of the dominant features which may attract their children's attention

Perceptions

Parents prefer to see commercial with clear and conspicuous disclosure of selling intent, particularly parents from middle/high income households.

Parental mediation strategies

Thomas Toy train set television advertisement: Save and wait strategy/restrictive mediation/active Mediation.

JillianTube sponsored toy unboxing video: Restrictive mediation/active mediation/coviewing with 'light degree of conversations.'

Lego Marvel Superhero advergame: Restrictive mediation/active mediation.

Table 5.3 Key emerging themes from one-on-one interviews

CHAPTER 6: FIRST STUDY (INTERVIEWS) - DISCUSSION

The purpose of the first study was to explore parents' understanding of advertainment and their mediation strategies regarding advertainment featuring media characters. Also, the study aimed to observe positive and negative qualities of the media characters. The one-on-one interview study with 35 parents allowed me to reduce the research gap that the previous literature could not answer.

One of the significant findings of the first study is that parents were only confused with advertising in the game format. Without an exception, all parents labelled that Thomas Train toy set television advertisement as an 'advertisement' or 'commercial'. They were very used to this traditional format of advertising indicating details of the tactics, which resemble developed persuasion knowledge. However, when parents viewed the game portraying popular media characters, one third of the parents were likely to consider the game as a general game for entertainment rather than any part of a persuasive tool for advertising the characters or Lego toys. In contrast to the advergame, a majority of parents clearly recognized the selling intent of the sponsored toy unboxing video which featured Jillian, a popular child influencer. Parents' confusion about advertainment was supported by Evans, Carlson, & Hoy (2013) and Hoy, Childers and Evans (2018).

Second, the presence of familiar licensed media characters or related merchandise was selected as one of the content features attracting children's attention. All the parents acknowledged that characters in each advertisement will make their children want the toys. Toy experts highlighted that the licensing business is a lucrative business for children's toys, games, and other playthings (The Toy Association, 2018). Due to character familiarity and ubiquity, children are more likely to positively respond to or show their loyalty to their favorite licensed

brands. This is likely the reason of the use of popular media characters in child-targeted advertisements (e.g., Jenkin et al., 2014). From the first study, parents already knew that the presence of media characters would increase their children's purchase request behavior. Even though parents do not discourage what characters their children like, they do monitor how the characters behave or are presented in the content even in advertising.

Third, parents were likely to show positive attitudes toward the traditional advertising than to the toy unboxing video, particularly parents from middle/high income households. They did not like how advertisers used 'sneaky' way of promoting their products to child audiences. Yet, most parents from low-income families did not negatively responded to the Jillian's unboxing video. Rather, they thought the unboxing video was more genuine and credible since the videos do not exaggerate what products actually are. This result is the opposite to what Hoy, Childers, and Evans (2018) showed from their study. In their study, parents were not very negative about the EvanTube toy unboxing videos since they do not contain any violent or sexual content which negatively impacts their children. My study might have different findings because parents with middle/high income were likely to have higher media literacy. Most of the parents were recruited near the University of Illinois campus and they were educated. Therefore, they may know more resources about media education for their children. This suggests a potential association between the level of parental media literacy and practice of three parental mediation strategies regarding advertainment content. Also, as toy unboxing videos have become more popular over the past few years, it is also likely that parents in general have a greater awareness, exposure to, and persuasion knowledge for this tactic.

Fourth, the first study also identified the nuances and the multiple ways that parents mediate different types of advertising. First, interviews yielded that parental mediation practice is

not as ‘simple’ as previously conceptualized (e.g., Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003, 2005, Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Regarding restrictive mediation, some parents directly say ‘no’ to children while many others alternatively suggest other options which their children can choose. And some of the same parents use both strategies. One parent noted that she does not oppose what her child wants because she feels that action will drive more attention and increase the child’s nagging. In the case of active mediation, there were some parents who talked about the unboxing video content superficially (e.g., talking about the characters and toys in the video) while others discussed how the child in the video did not get toys from their parents. There were also just a few parents who indicated that they proactively have conversations about advertising in their daily lives while they encounter advertisements on television or outside the home.

In addition, parental mediation strategies for children’s request behavior were also shared. Parental coping with child’s pestering was separately explored and discussed as one of the consequences of negative advertising effects (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003; 2005). The first study revealed that parental advertising mediation should be more extensively conceptualized. Dealing with children’s requests after watching advertisements could be considered as a form of advertising mediation. Further, expansion of parental advertising mediation could be aimed to not only consider protecting children from the harmful effects of advertising but also to train children how to be advertising literate. Strategies which allow children to practice consumer experience should be also reflected in parental mediation for future study (Nelson et al., 2017).

Another insight regarding parental mediation is more than one parental mediation strategy can concurrently occur. Previous studies acknowledged that active mediation and

restrictive mediation could be accompanied by parents for television programs (e.g., Abanto, 2004; Valkenburg et al., 1999). However, more studies rather focused on which mediation strategy is effective on children's advertising literacy and their brand attitudes (e.g., Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018) or frequently employed for media use (e.g., Livingstone & Helsper, 2008; Valkenburg et al., 1999) and advertising (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Shin, 2017). The present study enriches the nuances of the parental mediation framework regarding advertainment content featuring media characters.

Lastly, with respect to media characters, the first study provides insights on positive and negative qualities of media characters which parents mainly care for their children. Past research reviewed the prevalence of media characters which may positively or negatively impact children's cognitive and social development (e.g., Anderson et al., 2000; Calvert et al., 2007; Concord Evaluation Group, 2012; Keys, 2016; Kirkorian, Wartella, & Anderson, 2008; Lauricella, Gola, Calvert, 2011; Ryan, 2010). However, there have been few studies studying parents' perceptions of media characters. The first study showed that children's age was an important factor of parents' perceptions about media characters. Thus, for preschool-aged children, Daniel Tiger, Curious George, and Paw Patrol were more favorably evaluated by parents relative to superheroes and Ninja Turtle, which portray a certain level of violence and gender stereotypes.

Limitations and research questions for the second study

Type of negative media character and parental advertising mediation practice

Despite the interesting findings, there are a few limitations that should be addressed. First, the materials used for the interview were selected based on popularity of the content and

characters. The first study revealed that there are specific qualities that parents care about for their children's learning and growing. Curious George, Daniel Tiger, and Paw Patrol were selected as representative media characters that parents chose as good characters for their children while superheroes, Ninja Turtles, SpongeBob SquarePants, and Angry Bird were chosen as bad characters. However, the study did not systematically and rigorously examine about how displaying characters with positive and negative qualities in advertainment is associated with the level of the three types of parental mediation. How would parents differently perform parental mediation when advertainment content portrays media characters with negative qualities? For example, when presented with superheroes in advertainment content, how might parents' mediation change or be consistent for advertainment content featuring superheroes?

Scholars have also examined the influence of perceptual factors on parental mediation regarding advertising and materialism. Parents who perceive greater materialism effects from television commercials are more likely to help their child understand the nature of advertising or restrict the programs which their child watches (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Meirick et al., 2009). Regarding advergames, Shin and Huh (2011) demonstrated a positive association between restrictive mediation and negative perceptions toward videogames. Nikken and Jansz (2014) also showed that parents' perceptions about online risks influence all types of parental mediation. Finally, Evans (2014) supported a positive relationship between parental mediation of Internet use (active, restrictive, and co-view) and parental concerns about children's advergames. The interview study here also revealed that most parents were likely to sensitively respond to the advergame, which included violent scenes despite the portrayal of popular media characters. However, parents' conversations were less focused on advertising but rather other negative qualities such as violence, stereotypes, or fright.

A media character is a component of children's media content which drives fun stories and conveys messages (e.g., manners, friendship, helping, exploring). As one of the models, children may mimic characters' behaviors and internalize the values presented in programs, games, or even in advertisements. Thus, when parents view media characters with negative qualities, they may be more likely to limit or monitor the content, even fun advertainment containing media characters. Also, parents may actively initiate conversations with their child about how the content is not good or helpful. In contrast, parental mediation would less likely be performed when media characters with positive qualities are displayed in advertainment content because parents might not observe any problematic features in the content. Based on the first study, I assumed that the conversations might be limited to peripheral features of advertainment such as fun characters, their experience of character stories in books, television programs, or even in games. Thus, I assume that parents will be more likely to employ parental mediation when they watch advertainment featuring more negative characters (e.g., characters which may teach violence, sexuality, mean behavior, etc.). Based on the previous literature and observations of parents' self-reported behaviors in the first study (e.g., some parents used the multiple strategies for the unboxing video), the following hypotheses were suggested.

H1. Parents will be more likely to perform parental mediation when viewing advertainment content featuring negative characters compared to positive characters.
H1a: Parents will be more likely to perform active mediation when viewing advertainment content featuring negative characters compared to positive characters.
H1b: Parents will be more likely to perform restrictive mediation when viewing advertainment content featuring negative characters compared to positive characters.
H1c: Parents will be more likely to perform coviewing when viewing advertainment content featuring negative characters compared to positive characters.

Type of advertainment content on parental advertising mediation practice

In the first study, parents responded differently to advergames and sponsored toy unboxing videos. Even though the two types of advertainment contained different media

characters, the focus of mediation was different. Regarding the toy unboxing video, mostly parents perceived it as a sneaky 'commercial,' which includes the selling intent of toy companies. Some parents' mediation was restrictive mediation but also open to coviewing and active mediation. However, when parents viewed superhero characters in the advergame which contained smashing and fighting scenes, more parents showed their negative assessment of the advergame. They believed that the game is not age-appropriate for their children yet. Considering the differences in parental mediation between the advergame and the toy unboxing video in the first study, I assume that parental advertising mediation will differ in the two types of advertainment conditions.

In the previous research, mediation strategies for video watching (e.g., television viewing) were considered similarly with parental mediation of children's game playing. Nikken and Jansz (2003, 2006) examined the parental mediation practice of videogame playing of their children. They found that mediation strategies were categorized as active mediation, restrictive mediation, and co-playing (i.e. unfocused mediation). The study also highlighted that parents' perceived effect (positive or negative) of videogames on their children is also associated with parents' game mediation. Shin and Huh (2011) showed the same association between parents' perceptions toward games and their parental mediation styles. Parents presuming negative influence of videogames were more likely to practice restrictive mediation.

However, there is another view that parental mediation for watching and playing content may be different. Schaan et al. (2015) compared parental mediation of children's television and videogame use in Germany. Even though restrictive mediation was a commonly used strategy across media, parents were more likely to actively discuss game content while they coview television content compared to video games. The authors inferred that parents' lack of

videogame literacy might lead them to follow ‘a restrictive hands-off’ approach to guide children to have healthy media habits. The first study also supports Schaan et al.’s (2015) findings. One parent from the first study noted that they do not prefer their children playing games at home since it does not let them think what the content is but rather how to win the game. Two other parents said that no videogames were allowed at home because the parents were concerned about addiction. In other cases, one parent would ask her husband to deal with videogames since she is not ‘a videogame player’. In other words, the focus of vigilance might be different between video and game content. When it comes to advertising in a format of an entertaining video or a game, would parental mediation also differ? Advertainment type has not been addressed regarding parental advertising mediation; thus, the following research questions were suggested:

RQ1. To what extent do parents practice parental mediation when they watch an unboxing video versus an advergame?
RQ1a. To what extent do parents practice active mediation when they watch an unboxing video versus an advergame?
RQ1b. To what extent do parents practice restrictive mediation when they watch an unboxing video versus an advergame?
RQ1c. To what extent do parents practice coviewing when they watch an unboxing video versus an advergame?

Parental media literacy and parental advertising mediation practice

The first study explored to what extent parents understand various types of advertising featuring media characters. From their responses, their persuasion knowledge or advertising literacy was revealed to some extent when they shared their mediation strategies, particularly active mediation. I expect a significant relationship between parental media literacy and parental mediation, particularly active mediation.

There have been a handful of studies discussing parents’ media literacy and parental mediation. Scholars have examined media literacy primarily with children to maximize potential

desirable media effects and minimize undesirable effects on children's socialization (e.g., Nelson, 2016; Jeong, Cho, & Hwang, 2012). Particularly, scholars have explored the impact of critical media literacy on parental mediation strategies (e.g., Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017; Rasmussen et al., 2016). Critical Media Literacy (CML) is defined as parents' abilities to analyze and critically view media messages at various levels (Koc & Barut, 2016).

Some literature showed a positive relationship between parental media literacy and employment of parental mediation. Rasmussen et al. (2016) investigated how parental media literacy affects mediation performance and how attitudes toward the mediation act as a mediator between the two variables. Their study revealed that media literacy predicts whether parents engage in active mediation in media use. Interestingly, there was no significant effect of parental media literacy on parents' performance of restrictive mediation.

Recently, Daneels and Vanwynsberghe (2017) qualitatively investigated the influence of parental mediation strategies and parental social media literacy on their adolescents' social media use. Social media literacy was defined as "the technical and cognitive competencies users need to use social media in an effective and efficient way for social interaction and communication on the web" (Vanwynsberghe, Boudry, & Verdegem, 2015, p. 85). From their interviews, parents with higher cognitive competencies (e.g., being aware of commercial exposure or online risks) were likely to be involved in active mediation.

However, there is limited research on parental media literacy and parental mediation in general and especially regarding advertainment. Newman and Oates (2014) emphasized that parents who revealed a high level of persuasion knowledge were still unaware of newer forms of marketing communication targeting young children such as advergames. They agreed with Shin, Huh, and Faber's (2012) suggestions, which recommended parents' active involvement to guide

their children to be more critical consumers. Parents' active involvement requires knowledge to critically analyze a given media content. Daneels and Vanwynsberghe (2017) also noted that parents with high critical social media literacy were more likely to select active mediation over restrictive mediation or other technical strategies for their children's social media use. Based on the existing literature, I suggest the following hypotheses regarding advertainment content portraying popular media characters.

H2. Parents with higher media literacy will be more likely to perform active mediation than parents with lower media literacy.

H3. Parents with higher media literacy will be more likely to perform active mediation, but not restrictive mediation or coviewing.

Parents' education level and parental advertising mediation practice

First, even though the participants recruited for the interviews reflect a certain level of diversity in terms of parent's gender and their income, they are generally from a highly educated population. Out of 35 interviewees, 33 had a bachelor's degree or higher. This may be the reason why we could not detect the difference between parents because almost all of their educational levels were above the average. However, parents' education level is considered as one of the important factors of parental mediation (Nikken & Opree, 2018; Paus-Hasebrink, Bauwens, Durager and Ponte 2013; Warren 2017). Using more representative samples may yield different mediation strategies for advertainment content featuring media characters. Thus, the relationship between parent's educational level on parental mediation practice was suggested as a second research question.

RQ2. How would parents' educational level affect parental mediation practice of advertainment content?
RQ2a: How would parents' educational level affect active mediation of advertainment content?
RQ2b: How would parents' educational level affect restrictive mediation of advertainment content?
RQ2c: How would parents' educational level affect coviewing of advertainment content?

CHAPTER 7: SECOND STUDY (ONLINE EXPERIMENT) - METHOD

The online experiment focused on parental advertising literacy and mediation strategies in the context of media characters and advertainment content. Participants were recruited from a nationally representative sample of the United States through Qualtrics, which serves as a digital research platform for market researchers. In total, 199 Native or non-Native English-speaking parents of children aged four to six in the United States were eligible parents for the study. Both mothers and fathers were invited to the survey since mothers and fathers may employ different mediation practices (Warren, 2017). Participants each received around $4.00 inventive or the monetary equivalent with the remaining total going towards panel management fees. The study design, questionnaire, and procedure were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Illinois (IRB #19056).

This study employed a 2 (positive vs. negative characters) x 2 (toy unboxing vs. advergame) between-subject experimental design. The regular TV commercial was removed in the second study because the first study revealed parents' familiarity with traditional commercials. Thus, the second study focused on two different advertainment media contexts featuring popular media characters.

Stimuli

From the first study, parents generally perceived Daniel Tiger, Curious George, and Paw Patrol positively while they viewed superheroes, Ninja Turtle, and SpongeBob SquarePants somewhat negatively. In order to compare parents' perceptions toward 'positive' and 'negative' media characters, Paw Patrol and superheroes were selected for the second study. Participants randomly watched one of two types of videos featuring those characters: a toy unboxing video or

an advergame video. In other words, participants were assigned to view one of the following videos:

1) Paw Patrol toy unboxing video
2) Paw Patrol advergame video
3) Superhero toy unboxing video
4) Superhero advergame video

Figure 7.1 Screenshot from PAW Patrol mobile game


Figure 7.2 Screenshot from PAW Patrol toy unboxing video


Figure 7.3 Screenshot from Marvel superhero mobile game

Figure 7.4 Screenshot from Marvel superhero toy unboxing video

The toy unboxing videos were retrieved from CKN Toys unboxing channel. I selected a different unboxing video channel because familiarity to popular unboxing video channels such as Ryan Toy's Review and EvanTube HD might influence parents' perceptions toward the video content. In the two toy unboxing videos, a boy unboxes new toy packages and shows excitement to the audience. Advergames chosen for the second study are 'Marvel Strike Force' and 'Paw Patrol on a Roll'. The video clips include a part of the game scenes that players will encounter. All of these advertainment contexts feature the popular media characters.

Procedure

After agreement to participate in the study, participants were asked about their child's media use on weekdays and weekends. In the first study, children were likely to have different media time and use on weekdays and weekends; therefore, children's media habits on weekdays and weekends were asked separately regarding media time and content (e.g., Connell et al., 2015). Next, they were randomly assigned to review one of the four advertainment videos (i.e. Paw Patrol toy unboxing video, Paw Patrol advergame video, superhero toy unboxing video, superhero advergame video). Participants were then asked questions with respect to their media literacy (e.g., purpose of the content, production techniques, messages and values; Primack et al., 2006; Primack & Hobbs, 2009; Nelson, 2016). In addition to open-ended questions, participants'

level of general media literacy was measured with a general media literacy scale (Bier et al. 2010). Thus, the study assessed situational (with respect to a specific video) and general media literacy in order to better understand parental media literacy.

Next, participants answered a series of questions designed to assess their perceptions of the featured character they viewed in the media content (superheroes, dog characters in Paw Patrol) in terms of possible positive or negative effects on their children in terms of education, violence, gender stereotypes, racial stereotypes, fright, and commercialism. Then, they read the operationalized definition of advertainment and were asked about their mediation practice regarding advertainment content featuring their child's favorite media characters. Participants were told that the previous video they watched was an example of advertainment featuring media characters. Parents who viewed superhero-related videos only answered questions about superhero advertainment content. Parents who watched Paw Patrol videos were asked to answer questions about Paw Patrol advertainment. After they completed all questions, parents provided their demographic information such as age, gender, race, education, marital status, occupation, household annual income, and information about their children (e.g., age, gender). The incentive $6.88 was provided to each participant through Qualtrics. The study was completed in about 20 minutes on average.

Measures

I will discuss each of the constructs and measures below. The complete experimental survey can be found in Appendix D.

Positive and Negative Perceptions of Characters

For the manipulation check, parents' positive and negative perceptions toward two characters were measured. Scales from Anderson et al. (2000) and Meirick et al. (2009) were modified to measure the perceived educational value of media character content. The scale asked perceived learning values of the following areas: alphabet, grammar, a second language, numbers, and a variety of disciplines (e.g., math, history, geography, natural sciences), flexible thinking, problem-solving and social behavior. Each item was combined as 'parents' positive perceptions toward media characters.' For parental negative concerns of media characters, measures from Cantor et al. (1996), Meirick et al. (2009), and Valkenburg et al. (1999) were used. Parents reported their perceptions toward the media content regarding violence, fright, and commercialism. Gender and racial stereotypes norms were added based on Valkenburg et al.'s (1999) scale related to sexuality. The questions were rephrased to avoid asking 'leading' questions. For example, Valkenburg et al. (1999) directly asked questions such as "how much are you concerned of...?". In the present study, I asked, "To what extent would the media content...?". All answers were reported based on a 7-point Likert Scale (1 = not at all to 7 = very much).

Parental media literacy

Unfortunately, there is no consensus in the literature on assessing media literacy. A handful of studies operationalized "media literacy," which is generally conceptualized as "the ability to understand, analyze, evaluate and create media messages in a wide variety of forms" (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993). Hobbs and Frost (1998, 2003) and Arke and Primack (2009) extracted five domains of media literacy: 1) target audience, 2) sources, 3) similarities and differences, 4) techniques which grab the audience's attention, and 5) missing facts from the

content. In their studies, media literacy was assessed for three types of media: radio, television, and print. This operationalization is in the same line with the advertising literacy scale, which has been used by media scholars (e.g., Nelson, 2016; Rozendaal et al. 2011) even though their studies focused on children's advertising literacy.

Primack et al. (2006) developed and validated the smoking media literacy scale based on the three domains of media literacy according to the National Association of Media Literacy (Bazalgette, 1992; Thoman, 2003; authors and audiences, messages and meanings, and representation and reality), and established eighteen items. Later, Bier et al. (2010) launched a smoking media literacy program for middle school students and they employed Primack et al.'s (2006) smoking media literacy to measure the effectiveness of the program. Primack et al.'s (2006) scale was also adapted to general media literacy in Bier et al. (2010). Recently, Nelson et al. (under review) employed Bier et al.'s (2010) eleven-item of media literacy scale to assess their health and media intervention program for Jamaican adolescents and their mothers. Thus, 15 items of Bier et al.'s (2010) general media literacy scale were adapted to advertising and media content in a 5-point Likert Scale. This scale was used as an index of self-reported parents' general media literacy.

The current study also asked open-ended questions about videos to evaluate parents' situational media literacy related to advertainment (Duran et al., 2008). After viewing one of the advertainment videos (a toy unboxing video or an advergame), participants answered the questions regarding target audience, purpose (e.g., Arke & Primack, 2009; Hobbs & Frost, 2003; Nelson, 2016) and techniques and evaluations (Arke & Primack, 2009; Boerman et al., 2017; Duran et al., 2008; Nelson, 2016). In addition, to obtain parents' general perceptions about videos, I added a question "as a parent, what do you think about this video/content?".

Parental mediation strategies

The parental mediation scale for this study aimed to assess mediation strategies for advertainment content featuring media characters. For reliability and validity purposes, I adopted parental mediation scales used by Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) and Hudders and Cauberghe (2018). Hudders and Cauberghe (2018) measured parental mediation of brand placements in general media content (e.g., television, game, etc.). All items from Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) were adapted to brand placements. Thus, parental mediation items were adapted to advertainment in general. For co-viewing, I used the parental Internet mediation scale employed by Livingstone and Helsper (2008). In addition to existing scales, I added two questions about how parents might positively talk about advertainment content featuring media characters. I also assumed that not all parents in the study may have specifically encountered or talked about the advertainment featuring Marvel/DC superheroes or Paw Patrol. Therefore, each item was stated as 'I (would) tell/do…" to avoid confusion among participants (i.e., they could consider what they 'would' do).

Demographic information

Demographic information was also asked to participants such as parent's age, gender, ethnicity, education, household annual income, occupation, and child's age and gender. The first study revealed that a number of family members influence each child's media use and parents' media knowledge. Therefore, the second study also asked questions about a total number of children in their family and their gender.

CHAPTER 8: SECOND STUDY (ONLINE EXPERIMENT) - RESULTS

The final sample (N=198) consisted of 49.0% of female parents, 50.5% of male parents, and 0.5% of transgender male parents. Parents' age ranged from less than 21 years old to older than 50 years old. A majority of parents were high school graduates (32.3%), had some college without a degree (22.7%) or received a bachelor's degree (16.7%). The median annual income fell in the $50,000-$74,999 range. Participants consisted of white (76.8%), Black or African American (10.1%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1.5%), Asian (5.6%), and others (6%). The profile of parent samples well represented diversity in terms of gender, education, and income. See Appendix E for participants' demographic information in detail.

Reliability for parental mediation and parental media literacy

For the analysis, I calculated indices of the items used for the three types of parental mediation (i.e., active mediation, restrictive mediation, and coviewing). The active mediation subscale consisted of 6 items ($\alpha = .832$), restrictive mediation subscale of 4 items ($\alpha = .929$), and coviewing subscale consisted of 2 items ($\alpha = .659$). Cronbach's Alpha of the 15 items for parental media literacy was .862.

Manipulation check: Positive and negative perceptions of characters

To compare parents' responses to advertainment content featuring media characters which are positively and negatively viewed, parents were randomly assigned to Paw Patrol (N=96) or Superheroes (N=102). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for a reliability check of the scales used in the study to assess 'negative perceptions' ($\alpha = .882$) and 'positive perceptions' ($\alpha = .884$); thus, indices were created. Results of the one-way ANOVA showed that parents'

negative perceptions toward Paw Patrol (M=3.65, SD=1.35) and Superheroes (M=4.21, SD=1.04) were significantly different (F=10.78, $p < .01$) with superheroes displaying more negative perceptions. Also, positive perceptions toward Paw Patrol (M=5.41, SD=1.09) were significantly higher than Superheroes (M=4.61, SD=1.40) (F=19.79, $p < .01$).

Parental media literacy measure

Qualitative responses

In addition to 14 parental media literacy items, participants' situational media literacy was also measured. Participants primarily answered the following four open-ended questions related to the video: purpose, techniques, values and messages, and omitted information. Table 8.1 shows participants' responses to the given stimuli in each of the four experimental conditions. Interestingly, only 23 out of 198 participants recognized the selling intent of the advergame and the unboxing video. Only one participant talked about the selling intent of the superhero advergame, and none of them noted advertising in the Paw Patrol advergame. Most of the advertising purposes were actually reported from the unboxing video content. Also, there were 22 participants who negatively viewed the given advertainment content. Only 3 out of 23 parents who recognized the selling intent perceived the advertainment content negatively, which seems to suggest that recognizing selling intent may not always lead to negative attitudes toward the content, particularly if child-friendly media characters appear.

Paw Patrol advergame: • Purpose: Entertainment/ Rescuing animals/ Teaching animals, numbers, colors, and other skills/ problem solving and education/ Helping others/ Mental stimulation/ Common sense learning/ Teaching children cause and effect/ Not sure • Production techniques: Bright color and engaging/ Paw Patrol characters/ The animals and their interaction in the game/ Friendly voices/ Fun music • Message: Helping out in the community/ Humanity/ Being kind/ Team work/ Responsibilities, finishing what you start/ Sharing is caring • Omitted information: Nothing/ Not sure
Paw Patrol unboxing video: • Purpose: To sell Paw Patrol toys/ To show parents new toys/ Education/ To show how much fun toy is and encourage play/ To show how the toys work • Production techniques: Fun toys/ Loud music/ The child's pretend play/ Paw Patrol characters/ Colorful design • Message: Toys are fun/ Greed is good/ Buy one/ Play with others/ Playtime vs. TV time/ Imagination/ Not sure • Omitted information: Putting toys together (how to build the toys) / If the toys were given to the child or was purchased (sponsored or not)/ Age level recommendation/ Where to purchase/ prices of the toys/ Nothing/ Not sure
Superhero advergame: • Purpose: To have your child have fun/ Teach responsibility/ To fight bad guys with superheroes/ To get people like Marvel more/ Entertainment/ To make money/ To help children interact with each other/ To attract kids to play the game by making it full of action • Production techniques: Having familiar characters in the game/ All of the action of superheroes/ Action voices/ Graphics and the sounds/ Characters having the ability to fight with enemies/ • Message: Justice vs. injustice/ Coming together as a team overlooking each other flaws/ heroism/ teamwork/ violence solves problems/ Learn how to interact with other children/ Not sure • Omitted information: Nothing/ Not sure
Superhero unboxing video: • Purpose: Advertising toys/ To show Marvel toys and what they can do/ To inform what new toys are out /To make kids want the toys presented in the video/ Not exactly sure about the purpose • Production techniques: Superheroes/ a child who's in their children's age playing with toys/ superhero costume and a child surrounded by toys in the boxes/ New exciting toys/ A child's excitement in the video/ Not sure • Message: Cool toys for kids/ The toys have nice features/ Advertising/ promoting children's imagination/ A spoiled child/ hero image/ Learning to talk and be confident/ to have fun/ More stuff is better stuff/ No values rather than material things/ Not sure • Omitted information: Nothing/ Not sure/ Prices and where to purchase

Table 8.1 Summary of participants' qualitative responses regarding situational media literacy

Quantitative responses

The descriptive statistics of parental media literacy in each experimental condition is reported. A mean score of parental media literacy was 3.95 (SD=.52) on the scale of 1-5. One-way ANOVA showed that the mean scores of parental media literacy in each of the four different conditions (Paw Patrol advergame: M=3.86, SD=.60; Paw Patrol unboxing video: M=4.00, SD=.49; superhero advergame: M=3.90, SD=.52; superhero unboxing video: M=4.00, SD=.45) are not significantly different to each other [$F(3,194)=1.157$, $p>.05$]. Thus, the measure appears

to be a good one to assess general media literacy of parents even though this measure is 'perceived media literacy' of parents, not actual media literacy.

Correlations among the key variables

Before testing hypotheses, a series of zero-order correlation analysis were conducted among key constructs in the study and demographic characteristics. Table 7 shows zero-order correlation analysis of key variables in the overall dataset and Tables 8-11 indicate correlations between key variables in each experimental condition. Within the overall dataset, almost all variables were significantly and positively correlated to each other. Parents' gender was significantly correlated with active mediation and restrictive mediation. More specifically, male parents were more likely to perform active mediation [($F(2, 195)=3.502$, $p<.05$) male: $M=3.23$, $SD=.96$; transgender male: $M=3.5$, $SD=0$; female: $M=2.89$, $SD=.85$] and restrictive mediation [($F(2, 195)=4.732$, $p<.05$) male: $M=2.57$, $SD=.1.3$; transgender male: $M=2.75$, $SD=0$; female: $M=2.04$, $SD=1.09$] when types of character and advertainment were not considered. These gender differences in active mediation and restrictive mediation appeared in the superhero advergame ($r=.387$, $p<.01$) and the superhero unboxing video ($r=.299$, $p<.05$), respectively.

Parents' *educational level* was significantly and positively correlated with all three types of parental mediation when experimental conditions were not considered (active mediation: $r=.269$, $p<.01$; restrictive mediation: $r=.302$, $p<.01$; coviewing: $r=.174$, $p<.05$). Specifically, parent's educational level was positively correlated with active mediation in the Paw Patrol advergame condition ($r=.351$, $p<.05$) while it was correlated with restrictive mediation in the superhero advergame ($r=.413$, $p<.01$) and superhero unboxing video ($r=.302$, $p<.05$) conditions and with coviewing in superhero unboxing video ($r=.311$, $p<.05$). With coviewing, parent's education was positively correlated only in superhero unboxing video condition ($r=.311$, $p<.05$).

Income was also positively correlated with parental media literacy, active mediation and restrictive mediation. However, these significant correlations disappeared within each condition.

Parental media literacy was significantly and positively correlated with all three types of parental mediation (active mediation: r=.380, p<.01; restrictive mediation: r=.236, p<.01; coviewing: r=.192, p<.01). This variable was positively correlated with active mediation in each four experimental conditions while restrictive mediation was correlated in both Paw Patrol advertainment conditions, and coviewing only in Paw Patrol toy unboxing video. See Tables 8.2-8.6 for more details.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1: Gender	1						
2: Education	.347**	1					
3: Income	.339**	.644**	1				
4: Media literacy	.118	.156*	.201**	1			
5. Active mediation	.184**	.269**	.169*	.380**	1		
6. Restrictive mediation	.210**	.302**	.203**	.236**	.696**	1	
7. Coviewing	.072	.174*	.061	.192**	.497**	.412**	1

Table 8.2 Zero-order correlation analysis of key variables in overall dataset

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1: Gender	1						
2: Education	.311*	1					
3: Income	.244	.499**	1				
4: Media literacy	.059	.081	.004	1			
5. Active mediation	.245	.351*	.210	.338*	1		
6. Restrictive mediation	.273	.256	.278	.312*	.825*	1	
7. Coviewing	-.015	.176	.005	.074	.547**	.446**	1

Table 8.3 Zero-order correlation analysis of key variables in Paw Patrol advergame

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1: Gender	1						
2: Education	.412**	1					
3: Income	.365*	.660**	1				
4: Media literacy	.015	.270	.279	1			
5. Active mediation	.094	.264	.141	.403**	1		
6. Restrictive mediation	.078	.281	.180	.446**	.662**	1	
7. Coviewing	.036	.186	.216	.496**	.578**	.435**	1

Table 8.4 Zero-order correlation analysis of key variables in Paw Patrol toy unboxing video

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1: Gender	1						
2: Education	.224	1					
3: Income	.361**	.707**	1				
4: Media literacy	.256	.133	.255	1			
5. Active mediation	.387**	.258	.270	.427**	1		
6. Restrictive mediation	.178	.413**	.259	.116	.541**	1	
7. Coviewing	.173	.046	-.007	.070	.300*	.335*	1

Table 8.5 Zero-order correlation analysis of key variables in superhero advergame

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1: Gender	1						
2: Education	.451**	1					
3: Income	.390**	.712**	1				
4: Media literacy	.038	.137	.277	1			
5. Active mediation	.035	.264	.143	.335*	1		
6. Restrictive mediation	.299*	.302*	.140	.053	.729**	1	
7. Coviewing	.142	.311*	.090	.155	.492**	.405**	1

Table 8.6 Zero-order correlation analysis of key variables in superhero toy unboxing video

Hypotheses testing

The descriptive statistics associated with active mediation, restrictive mediation, and coviewing across the four experimental groups are reported in Table 8.7. A series of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted to test the hypotheses and answer research questions. Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) noted that ANCOVA allows researchers to reduce error term and increase test sensitivity of F-test, which eventually increases main and interactive effects. In other words, this can remove unwanted variance on dependent variables. Prior to conducting the ANCOVA, the assumption of normality was tested and determined that the data are normally distributed (-2< kurtosis <2, George & Mallery, 2010). Furthermore, the assumption of homogeneity of variances was assessed based on Levene's F test [active mediation: $F(3, 194)=1.610$, $p=.181$; restrictive mediation: $F(3,194)=.387$, $p=.762$]; coviewing: $F(3, 194)=1.547$, $p=.204$]. ANCOVA was conducted with type of media character (Paw Patrol vs. Superheroes) and type of advertainment (toy unboxing video vs. advergame) as independent variables and other demographics (e.g., parent's gender, educational level, annual household income and

parental media literacy) as covariates and three types of parental mediation strategies as the dependent variables (Observed power: .844).

	Type of media characters	Type of advertainment	M	SD	N
Active mediation	Paw Patrol	Unboxing video	3.11	.98	48
		Advergame	2.73	.99	48
	Superheroes	Unboxing video	3.24	.90	50
		Advergame	3.15	.74	52
Restrictive mediation	Paw Patrol	Unboxing video	2.30	1.25	48
		Advergame	2.13	1.23	48
	Superheroes	Unboxing video	2.40	1.29	50
		Advergame	2.41	1.15	52
Coviewing	Paw Patrol	Unboxing video	3.40	1.05	48
		Advergame	3.24	1.09	48
	Superheroes	Unboxing video	3.40	.92	50
		Advergame	3.52	.90	52

* Note: Each type of parental mediation was measured in 5-point Likert Scale (1= never to 5 = always)

Table 8.7 Descriptive statistics of three types of parental mediation

The influence of type of characters on parental mediation practice

H1 inquires whether parental advertising mediation differs when negative characters are presented in the advertainment (H1a: active mediation; H1b: restrictive mediation; H1c: coviewing). The analysis revealed that there is a significant main effect of a type of media character on active mediation [$F(1,191)=5.651$, $p<.05$] after controlling for the effect of parental media literacy and their demographics. Regarding active mediation, as expected, parents who viewed "negative" characters (i.e., superheroes) in advertainment were more likely to perform active mediation (M=3.20, SD=.82) compared to parents who watched "positive" characters (i.e., Paw Patrol) in advertainment (M=2.92, SD=1.00). This indicates that parents tend to pay attention and actively engage in conversations about advertainment content with their children when viewing media characters which parents more negatively perceive. Compared to Paw Patrol, the media character which parents find conveys more positive qualities, parents may sensitively respond to potential negative messages and values for their children's socialization.

Yet, no main effects were found for restrictive mediation [F(1,191)=1.536, p>.05] or coviewing [F(1,191)=1.265, p>.05]. Thus, the H1a was supported and H1b and H1c were rejected.

The influence of type of advertainment on parental mediation practice

R1 asks how parental mediation practice (R1a: active mediation; R1b: restrictive mediation; R1c: coviewing) differs in two different types of advertainment conditions (advergame vs. toy unboxing). The ANCOVA showed that the type of advertainment had no significant effect on any parental mediation strategies. The means between the sponsored unboxing video (M=3.18, SD=.94) and the advergame (M=3.00, SD=.89) were not statistically different for parents' performing active mediation [F(1,191)=1.224, p>.05], restrictive mediation [F(1,191)=.031, p>.05], or coviewing [F(1,191)=.136, p>.05]. Also, there was no interaction effect of type of characters and type of advertainment content for any of these analyses; thus, post-hoc tests were not performed.

The influence of parental media literacy on parental mediation of advertainment

The second hypothesis assumed that parental media literacy is positively associated with active mediation. The third hypothesis predicted that the parental media literacy will explain the variance of active mediation significantly over the other two types of mediation practice, restrictive mediation and coviewing. Covariates were set to control confounding variables when assessing how fixed factors create significant differences in a dependent variable. Thus, to examine how parental media literacy relates to three types of parental mediation practice, parental media literacy was inserted as one of the covariates. The results of the ANCOVA showed that parental media literacy greatly explains parental active mediation [F(1,191)=26.060, p<.01] but also restrictive mediation [F(1,191)=7.501, p <.01] and coviewing [F(1,191)=6.330, p <.05]. This means, parents are more likely to perform three types of parental mediation strategies

when they have higher level of media literacy regardless of the experimental conditions. Thus, H2 is supported and H3 was rejected.

Positive association between parents' educational level and parental mediation practice

R2 inquires to what extent parents' education level relates to each of the three types of parental mediation. The zero-order correlation result showed a positive correlation between parental media literacy and each of the three types parental mediation strategies. To observe the influence of parents' education on parental mediation practice, education level was inserted as one of the covariates. The ANCOVA result showed that parents' educational level remained as a significant factor of active mediation [$F(1,191)=9.068$, $p<.01$]. restrictive mediation [$F(1,191)=9.185$, $p<.01$], and coviewing [$F(1,191)=6.085$, $p<.05$]. See Tables 8.8-8.10 for more details.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	.065	1	.065	.097	.756
Gender	.927	1	.927	1.376	.242
Education	6.109	1	6.109	9.068	.003
Income	.852	1	.852	1.264	.262
Media literacy	17.557	1	17.557	26.060	.000
Character type (C)	3.807	1	3.807	5.651	.018
Advertainment type (A)	.825	1	.825	1.224	.270
Error	128.681	191	.674		

Table 8.8 Test of Between-Subjects Effects (DV: Active mediation)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	.665	1	.665	.502	.480
Gender	2.835	1	2.835	2.141	.145
Education	12.162	1	12.162	9.185	.003
Income	.339	1	.339	.256	.613
Media literacy	9.931	1	9.931	7.501	.007
Character type (C)	2.034	1	2.034	1.536	.217
Advertainment type (A)	.041	1	.041	.031	.860
Error	252.889	191	1.324		

Table 8.9 Test of Between-Subjects Effects (DV: Restrictive mediation)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	9.115	1	9.115	9.806	.002
Gender	.022	1	.022	.024	.877
Education	5.656	1	5.656	6.085	.015
Income	1.710	1	1.710	1.839	.177
Media literacy	5.844	1	5.844	6.330	.013
Character type (C)	1.176	1	1.176	1.265	.262
Advertainment type (A)	.126	1	.126	.136	.713
Error	177.537	191	.930		

Table 8.10 Test of Between-Subjects Effects (DV: Coviewing)

Summary

The second study quantitatively examined how parental advertising mediation differs depending on the types of characters featured and the type of advertainment. In addition, the study also explored whether parental media literacy and other demographic characteristics predict the way parents mediate advertainment content. The study shows that parents are more likely to perform active mediation when media characters with negative qualities were presented in the advertainment content (i.e., superheroes) compared to media characters with positive qualities (i.e., Paw Patrol). Yet, restrictive mediation and coviewing were not significantly different in the two types of media character conditions. Therefore, H1a was supported and H1b and H1c were rejected. Three types of parental mediation were also not likely to be affected by type of advertainment (unboxing video or advergame) (RQ1). Interestingly, parental media literacy was a key determinant of active mediation, restrictive mediation and coviewing (H2 supported, and H3 rejected). Also, parents' educational background was likely to predict all three types of parental mediation: active mediation, restrictive mediation, and coviewing (RQ2a, 2b, and 2c).

CHAPTER 9: SECOND STUDY (ONLINE EXPERIMENT) - DISCUSSION

The second study aimed to systematically examine how positive and negative characters in different advertainment formats (e.g., toy unboxing: influencer marketing on social media vs. advergame) are associated with parental mediation practices. In addition, the study focused on parental media literacy and how it may be related to parental active mediation of the advertainment content. The second study also further investigated how parents' educational level makes a difference in parental mediation practice of advertainment content containing media characters. Through an online experiment, I explored several potential determinants of multiple parental mediation approaches.

First, in line with expectations, the study found that parents' active mediation varied significantly across the two types of media characters. More specifically, parents are likely to actively communicate about advertainment with their children when advertainment content features more negative characters. The material used for the superhero groups included Marvel characters fighting to defeat enemies. Compared to Paw Patrol characters, which were more positively viewed by parents, parents tended to sensitively respond to potential non-educational messages that superheroes explicitly or implicitly expose to children. The toy unboxing video also contained superhero toys, which might suggest a gender-typed play. Compared to superhero advertainment content, parents were not likely to use active mediation for Paw Patrol content, particularly the advergame, which included several problem-solving tasks. As reported in the first study, qualities of media characters may make a difference whether parents interact about advertainment with their children or not. This significant relationship between presentation of negative characters and active mediation supports the previous studies examining the positive

association between negative perceptions toward media content and active mediation (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Evans, 2014; Nikken & Jansz, 2006; Valkenburg et al., 1999).

The study did not find any significant differences in restrictive mediation or coviewing mediation practices across the four different conditions. This result is the opposite to other past studies illuminating negative perceptions toward media content determining restrictive mediation (e.g., Evans, 2014; Shin & Huh, 2011). Perhaps, participants' favorable attitudes toward Paw Patrol and Marvel characters spill over to limit their restrictive mediation. In Ahn and Nelson's (2019) study, when parents perceived the book does not include any harmful messages, or they believe that literacy is more important, they were likely to respect children's character preference while they select children's books. Indeed, the mean scores for restrictive mediation across the four experimental conditions were lower than 3 (on a scale of 1-5). Even though participants responded to superheroes more negatively than Paw Patrol, parents in the online experiments actually showed positive attitudes toward superhero characters since Marvel and DC superheroes are also beloved licensed media characters by adults (Bowden, 2018). More than half of the participants described the superhero advertainment content favorably in the open-ended question. Restriction does not appear to be a prevalent parental mediation style for the content in this study. Also, no significant difference in coviewing were found; this might occur because participants might want to coview the fun content regardless of character type (Paw Patrol: M=3.32, SD=1.06; Marvel superheroes: M=3.46, SD=.91).

Second, the type of advertainment (unboxing video vs. advergame) also did not make a significant difference in active mediation, restrictive mediation, or coviewing. The association between parental mediation and type of advertainment was suggested as a research question because none of the studies examined how parents mediate different formats of advertainment in

the previous studies. The first study revealed that many parents differently responded to the two types of advertainment featuring media characters or related merchandise, particularly highly educated parents. The first study also showed that parents three forms of advertising (traditional commercial, sponsored toy unboxing video, advergame) so parents may have been 'relatively' responding to the advertising content. However, the second study showed no significant influence on parental mediation because 'character' and entertainment component might trump over other factors.

Third, the study illustrated the significant positive association between parental media literacy and the three types of parental mediation practice. When parents understand media and advertising effects, they are more likely to interact with their children about advertising, limit the advertising exposure, and monitor what advertising content their children view. Even though there were few parents who noticed the selling intent of advertainment content in the online experiment according to open-ended responses, parents with higher media literacy were more likely to think and attempt to talk openly about brand placements, sponsored unboxing videos, or advergames. Rasmussen et al. (2016) examined parental critical thinking and active and restrictive mediation in addition to parents' attitudes toward active and restrictive mediation. However, in their study, parental media literacy was measured only by parents' critical thinking skill, which might not clearly represent the entire media literacy concept. This dissertation used an established general media literacy scale broadly employed by previous studies (e.g., Bier et al., 2010; Nelson et al., under review; Primack et al., 2006).

Out of interest, demographic variables such as parent's gender, educational level, and income were assessed for key concepts. Past research has suggested that mothers and fathers may perform different mediation roles (e.g., Warren, 2017). The results of the correlation

analyses showed that parents' gender is positively correlated with active mediation and restrictive mediation. Results of follow-up one-way ANOVA also showed that fathers were significantly more likely to perform active mediation of the superhero advergame compared to mothers. In the case of superhero unboxing video, fathers were more likely to perform restrictive mediation compared to mothers. Perhaps, males have more knowledge and interests in superhero-related content and are likely to perform parental mediation than mothers do.

Parents' education turned out to be a key determinant of all three types of parental mediation. Particularly, parents' educational level emerged as a predictor of parental restrictive mediation of advertainment content featuring negative media characters (superheroes). Highly educated parents were more likely to restrict the media content, which might offer negative messages to their children by the characters. Education explained a significant amount of variance of active mediation and coviewing in the Paw Patrol advergame and the superhero unboxing video, respectively. The influence of parents' education was not revealed in the first study since interviewees were mainly from a highly educated population. However, previous studies highlighted that parents' educational level should be considered as important factor of parental mediation (Nikken & Opree, 2018; Paus-Hasebrink, Bauwens, Durager & Ponte, 2013; Warren, 2017). In the second study, participants' educational level varied from less than high school to doctorate degree, mainly consisted of high school graduates, some college with no degree, and associate degree. As a result of this more diverse sample, I was able to detect the influence of education on variables of interest. The analysis revealed that parents' educational level was positively related to all three types of mediation depending on which characters and advertainment type are presented. This may be because parental media literacy was highly correlated with parents' educational level.

Finally, the second study contributes to literature in parental media literacy. The study measured parental media literacy qualitatively according to situational media literacy (i.e., media literacy for the advertainment they viewed) and also quantitatively (general media literacy according to a scale). By analyzing two types of data, the study elaborated on how a person with an adequate level of media literacy may still not critically think and assess newer forms of advertising. Despite media literacy scores above the scale midpoint, only 11% of 198 participants recognized or wrote down the purpose of advertainment content as 'selling' or 'advertising'. Also, there were very few participants who negatively responded to the advergames and unboxing videos (about 11%). Only 3 out of 23 participants who noticed the selling intent negatively viewed the given content. This finding may suggest that media characters obviously impact parents' evaluation of advertainment content. By measuring parental media literacy in qualitative and quantitative ways, my dissertation shed a light on the need of more systematic parental media literacy scale for future studies.

CHAPTER 10: GENERAL DISCUSSION

Overview

The aim of the dissertation was to explore parents' understanding of advertainment containing popular media characters. As forms of advertising have become more subtle and entertaining, even adults are not able to recognize the selling intent of those ads. Also, the dissertation examined how parents mediate advertising, particularly advertainment content portraying media characters.

For more than 60 years, media character brands (e.g., Disney) have been targeting children and their parents. In the late twentieth century, selling tie-in toys with popular child-targeted shows were a prevalent marketing strategy (Steyer, 2002). In the 1980s, media characters were in the center of host-selling and program-length commercials (Greenfield et al., 1990; Seiter, 1993; Steyer, 2002). Even today, media characters are likely to systematically build and spread character worlds by transmedia storytelling and transmedia branding (Demott, 2015; Ilhan, 2011; Jenkins, 2006; Tenderich, 2014). Media characters jump over multiple media platforms and create engaging character experiences. Among 'transmedia characters', there are certain types of characters which are believed to negatively or positively influence children's cognitive and social development (e.g., Anderson et al., 2000; Calvert et al., 2007; Concord Evaluation Group, 2012; Keys, 2016; Kirkorian, Wartella, & Anderson, 2008; Lauricella, Gola, Calvert, 2011; Ryan, 2010). Scholars and other media experts expressed their concerns on how those characters may influence children's aggression, fear, stereotypes and consumerism attitudes. However, little attention has been given to what extent character may impact parents' mediation or understanding of advertainment featuring these characters.

Two studies of my dissertation explore the role of media characters in advertainment content. In the first study, parents acknowledged that media characters presented in advertainment would be a strong driver of their children's interest in the content. The second study also underscored the significant effect of type of characters on parental active mediation. When viewing potential negative impact of media characters, parents were more likely to engage in conversations about advertainment containing those characters. The use of media characters is not a new marketing strategy to attract young children. However, there has been a disconnection between the use of media characters and advertainment except a few studies (e.g., Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013; Putnam, Cotto, & Calvert., 2018). With qualitative and quantitative research approach, my dissertation illuminated that popular media characters are a part of the attractive features of child-targeted advertising, but that may be the reason why parents particularly differently respond compared to other advertising without any characters.

Two studies also emphasize the significant role of parental media literacy and other demographic factors for parental mediation practice. The first study revealed that highly educated parents from middle/income households were likely to have critical attitudes toward newer forms of child-targeted advertising. Their interest and knowledge of the current media landscape and advertising was an important indicator of performing parental mediation relative to previous experience of sponsored toy unboxing video. The second study also highlighted how parental media literacy and education significantly predict active mediation. These findings suggest that it is crucial to provide ample resources about media and advertising to their parents and community support to help parents practice the effective ways to mediate various forms of advertising. The summary of research findings of the two studies are listed in Table 10.1 and Figure 10.1.

Study	Research questions and hypotheses	Findings
Study one	RQ1. What media characters' qualities are positively and negatively considered by parents?	Parents prefer childlike characters which provide educational messages (e.g., helping, problem-solving, animals) while they dislike age-inappropriate characters which encourage violent and unrealistic ideas
	RQ2. What is the level of parents' media literacy regarding advertainment with popular child-friendly media characters?	Parents clearly recognize the selling intent of the traditional advertisement, and somewhat of the sponsored toy unboxing videos whereas few parents noticed the content's selling intent of the advergame. Parents prefer to watch traditional advertisements to newer forms of advertising, particularly parents from middle/high income households.
	RQ3. What types of parental mediation are practiced by parents regarding advertainment content featuring child-friendly media characters?	1. Traditional television toy advertisements: parents were likely to use 'save and wait' strategy, restrictive mediation, and active mediation. 2. Sponsored toy unboxing videos: Parents were likely to employ restrictive mediation, active mediation, or combined strategy of active mediation and 'light conversations about the videos.' 3. Advergames (violent): Parents were likely to choose restrictive mediation or active mediation. They consider advergames as general games rather than advertising. Parents (would) concurrently use more than one type of parental mediation of advertainment featuring media characters.

Table 10.1 Summary of research findings of study one and study two

Study two	H1a: Parents will be more likely to perform active mediation when viewing advertainment content featuring negative characters compared to positive characters. H1b: Parents will be more likely to perform restrictive mediation when viewing advertainment content featuring negative characters compared to positive characters. H1c: Parents will be more likely to perform coviewing when viewing advertainment content featuring negative characters compared to positive characters.	Character type was likely to influence active mediation of advertainment but not restrictive mediation or coviewing. Thus, H1a was supported and H1b and H1c were not supported.
	RQ1a. To what extent do parents practice active mediation when they watch an unboxing video versus an advergame? RQ1b. To what extent do parents practice restrictive mediation when they watch an unboxing video versus an advergame? RQ1c. To what extent do parents practice coviewing when they watch an unboxing video versus an advergame?	Type of advertainment did not significantly explain the variance of any of the three types of parental mediation.
	H2. Parents with higher media literacy will be more likely to perform active mediation than parents with lower media literacy. H3. Parents with higher media literacy will be more likely to perform active mediation, but not restrictive mediation or coviewing.	Parental media literacy was likely to be a key factor predicting active mediation, restrictive mediation, and coviewing. Thus, H2 was supported and H3 was rejected.
	RQ2a: How would parents' educational level affect active mediation of advertainment content? RQ2b: How would parents' educational level affect restrictive mediation of advertainment content? RQ2c: How would parents' educational level affect coviewing of advertainment content?	Parents' educational level, which is highly positively correlated with parental media literacy, was likely to influence all three types of mediation.

Table 10.1 (cont.) Summary of research findings of study one and study two

Implications

This research provides a few implications for the children and media literature. First, my dissertation contributed to advertising literature, which has been primarily focused on children over six years old and their parents. According to the previous literature, preschool-aged children

are not able to distinguish selling intent of advertising in general as cued processors (e.g., John, 1999; Friestad & Wright, 1994). Thus, scholars have focused on enhancing older children's persuasion knowledge or media literacy to diminish potential detrimental advertising effects (e.g., Grohs et al., 2012; Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Rozendaal et al., 2011). However, few articles studied children's parents who have a great influence on children's consumer socialization through communication and parental mediation (e.g., Atkinson, Nelson, & Rademacher, 2015; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018; Nelson et al., 2017). My dissertation probes parents' overall understanding of newer forms of child-targeted advertisements featuring popular licensed media characters and their different mediation strategies.

The current research also examines how the presence of media characters in advertainment may influence three types of parental mediation. Existing literature explored various forms of advertainment (advergames, brand placements, and influencer marketing) and parental mediation/perceptions (e.g., Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013; Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018; Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018). Nonetheless, no-known studies have investigated the association between parental mediation and advertainment which particularly displays media characters. The impact of media characters has been often addressed regarding children's cognitive and social development such as education, social behavior, violence, and sexuality (e.g., Anderson et al., 2000; Meirick et al., 2009; Valkenburg et al., 1999). In Evans, Carlson, and Hoy (2013), they used advergames of SpongeBob SquarePants and other licensed character brands, but the study did not capture how displaying familiar media characters in advergames affect parents' attitudes toward advergames. Two studies in my dissertation revealed that type of media characters presented in advertainment content play an important role in performing active

mediation. In the first study, parents were likely to sensitively react to media characters which might cause negative consequences (e.g., violence, stereotypes, fright, etc.) compared to relatively positively viewed characters. Also, when the media characters which are more negatively perceived by parents are presented, parents are likely to practice active mediation. However, parents' attitudes toward media characters are also likely to be related to parental mediation. The study provides a potential alternative view of the more complex relationship between media characters and advertainment and perceptions of parents on that relationship.

Third, the study offers rich insights to future researchers about assessing media literacy with a holistic approach. Scholars have not reached a consensus on how to evaluate individuals' media literacy in advertising or related media studies even though they agreed that media literacy consists of several key components such as identifying the purpose of the content, production techniques, messages and values, and omitted information (Arke & Primack, 2009; Bier et al., 2010; Primack et al., 2006). Also, very few studies probed parental media literacy in an advertising context. My dissertation qualitatively measured to what extent parents of preschool-aged children understand newer formats of advertising and quantitatively assessed their overall thoughts on advertising and media. Both measures were assessed simultaneously to see a gap between parents' general media literacy and their situational media literacy. Even though two of the measures were not combined in the analyses, my dissertation shed a light on measuring parental media literacy more holistically in the context of advertainment content with a nationally representative sample. Thus, the study stimulates a discussion about how to assess individuals' media literacy more accurately.

Fourth, the study suggests developing an extended version of parental advertising mediation. In the previous literature, an underlying assumption of parental mediation is that

parents should mediate children-targeted advertising to protect children and adolescents from 'potentially undesirable advertising effects' (e.g., Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003, 2005; Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018; Potter, 2010; Rozendaal et al., 2011). Thus, parental mediation measure generally includes whether parents limit advertising exposure or talk about potential negative effects of advertising with their children. However, as Atkinson, Nelson, and Rademacher (2015) and Nelson et al. (2017) highlighted, there are some positive outcomes of advertising or consumer experience. The first study of my dissertation also showed how conversations about saving money and delaying impulsive buying could train children as wise and critical consumers. Considering of parents' interactions with their children about purchasing in addition to advertising, it is essential to re-evaluate parental advertising mediation in terms of potential positive consequences of advertising. Perhaps, parental mediation of children's purchase request can be integrated with parental advertising mediation since advertising and purchasing are highly connected.

Fifth, my dissertation also suggests ideas to educators about developing media education programs for parents. As stated above, parents play a crucial role in shaping children's media habits and advertising related knowledge (Nelson et al., 2017). However, the focus of the previous advertising or media literacy programs was children but rarely parents. Also, parents often underestimate various potential effects of media characters on their children although the characters are very persuasive tool to attract young children's attention. Examining parental media literacy with various advertainment content featuring media characters offers resources and guidelines for media training programs for parents of young children. Particularly, two studies in my dissertation shed a light on the significant relevance of parents' educational level and income on parental media literacy and parental mediation. As shown in the both studies,

parents have different level of media literacy to understand various formats of advertainment content. Immersive advergames were more likely to be considered as a 'game' rather than advertisements. Thus, media education program to enhance parents' mediation should be designed with multiple levels of media education programs for parents from a wide range of backgrounds.

Sixth, the study also suggests guidelines and suggestions for regulatory actions of policymakers. The FTC has offered guidelines regarding sponsored unboxing videos (FTC 2015). The FTC specified that anyone who received any free products or any other forms of compensation, the individual should disclose the source of sponsorship in a clear and conspicuous way. Otherwise, the endorsement would be regarded as misleading and deceptive. CARU has also suggested that influencers of YouTube channels must properly include at least audio disclosure for young audiences (CARU 2016, 2017). My dissertation suggests that sponsorship disclosure should be clearly presented in influencers' videos. In the first study, parents were likely to notice the nature of advertising from the toy unboxing video but failed to identify the sponsorship disclosure statement at the corner of the video. In the second study, few parents mentioned about the selling intent of the toy unboxing videos. The findings indicate that it is essential to present conspicuous and clear sponsorship disclosure in influencers' videos so that parents can easily identify the selling intent of sponsored videos targeting young children.

The current research also provides implications regarding advergames. There is no existing legislation and regulations specifying criteria about how sponsorship should be disclosed in advergames although Unfair Commercial Practices Directives have monitored advertisers whether their commercial practice is unfair, aggressive, or misleading (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2015). It is true that advergames stand between advertising and regular games

in a vague position. This may be the reason why parents were confused of the purpose of advergames compared to other advertising formats (e.g., Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013; Hoy, Childers, & Evans, 2018). A certain number of participants in two studies failed to detect the selling intent of advergames but rather focused on the entertaining element of the advergames. Also, when popular media characters appear in advergames, even parents are likely to show positive attitudes. Thus, sponsorship disclosure is particularly encouraged in advergames for parents to let them know that their children are now engaging in advertising, which may attenuate persuasion effects at least to for parents.

Limitations and future research directions

Although my dissertation shed a light on the substantial body of media and children literature, there are several limitations which should be enhanced by future researchers. First, the data presented in the study does not establish causality. Two studies highlighted the importance of parental media literacy and education; however, study two only shows how each key variable may determine three types of parental mediation practice. For future studies, the media character effect could be measured by comparing a control group (i.e., traditional advertising without any media character) and experimental groups (i.e. various forms of newer forms of advertainment containing media characters). To accurately assess the effect of media characters in the advertainment setting, attitudes toward media characters and attitudes toward advertainment in general may be separately evaluated and considered them as key variables. Accordingly, it would provide a much clearer picture for which causes parental mediation of advertainment.

Second, I only examined two types of advertainment to explore parental advertising mediation. There are other types of advertainment, which are created to promote media character brands and entertain targeted audiences. For example, there are multiple forms of ‘adver’books

targeting children to read. Each character book may help young children enhance their literacy skills but also remind them about stories of their favorite media characters. In general, children's educational effects are often observed in book reading rather than watching television or playing games (e.g., Breyer, 2017). Device bias might affect the degree of parental mediation performance, particularly in a book form of advertainment. Future studies may assess parental mediation practice in a variety of advertainment conditions.

Third, I discovered that advertising can be used as a means of 'idea developer' or 'consumer trainer' in the first study, but this finding was not reflected in parental mediation scale in the second study. Instead, my dissertation employed already established parental mediation scales of children's media use (e.g., Mendoza, 2009; Shin & Huh, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 1999) or advertising (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003, 2005; Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013; Hudders & Cauberghe, 2018). Future researchers could design more well-represented parental mediation scale which aims to protect children from detrimental advertising effects, but also help children learn consumer experience. Also, it would be meaningful to establish the parental advertising mediation scale which reflects parents' performing more than one mediation style simultaneously for advertainment content.

In addition, we may need further studies about parenting style and parental advertising mediation (e.g., Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Carlson, Grossbart, & Stuenkel, 1992; Evans, Carlson, & Hoy, 2013; Mikeska, Harrison & Carlson, 2017). Parenting style has been studied with respect to consumer socialization. Carlson and Grossbart (1988) identified five primary parenting styles and showed how parents with each parenting style have different consumer socialization tendencies. For example, Authoritative parents, who emphasize children's rights and responsibilities, are more likely to have consumer goals, be more active in consumer

communication, and less positive about advertising compared to Authoritarian parents (e.g., parents more likely to control with their higher authority) and Neglecting parents (e.g., parents who have no desire to supervise or promote children's development). A more recent study by Mikeska, Harrison, and Carlson (2017) also confirmed that Authoritative parenting styles are likely to elicit positive effects on parent-child interactions about the marketplace, particularly with older children. Then, would Authoritative parents perform active mediation and restrictive mediation more than indulgent parents who are likely to be permissive and warm when interacting with children? With theoretical basis in socialization theory, future scholars may need to explore how parenting styles impact parental mediation of advertainment, particularly featuring media characters.

In addition to parenting style, scholars may also need to look at family communication patterns. Previous studies (e.g., Buijzen, 2009; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Carlson & Grossbart, 1988; Fujioka & Austin, 2002) stressed that family consumer communication patterns influence adolescents' consumer knowledge. Concept-orientation style, which includes negotiation, critical open questions about consumption and media, tend to help adolescents to enhance consumer-related knowledge whereas adolescents from families with socio-oriented communication style, which emphasizes obedience and harmony, tend to be vulnerable to advertising techniques. Fujioka and Austin (2002) found that concept-orientation style tended to use both negative mediation (counter-reinforcement of media messages) and positive mediation (endorsement of media messages) in addition to active discussions with children. No significant findings were observed between socio-orientation and discussion behavior or negative mediation. Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) also identified that the concept-oriented communication pattern is more effective in diminishing unintended negative advertising effects

on children such as materialism, purchase requests and conflicts with family members. Although some research has co-examined parental mediation and consumer communication style in children's media use, recent studies about parental advertising mediation have focused more on 'what to' than 'how to' in the context of advertainment. How parents engage in discussing advertising with their children may be also important since family communication styles might elicit different consequences of active mediation, restrictive mediation, and coviewing. In consideration of both communication and mediation style, future researchers can examine the most effective ways to help children's media literacy.

Also, future researchers may also need to pay more attention to the various ways that parents can have discussions about advertising. In the past literature, scholars measured to what extent parents talk about negative aspects of advertising with their children to assess parental active mediation of advertising through 'information delivery' methods (e.g., 'the advertising does not always tell the truth'). However, there are multiple ways that parents can ask questions or facilitate conversations and thinking about advertising. Literature regarding children's book reading provides interesting insights. The first type is 'what-explanations', which confirms children's understanding of storylines or main ideas in books. To apply this principle in parental advertising mediation, this practice may be engaging in conversations about whether children capture the selling intent of persuasive messages in various advertising contexts by consistently asking questions. The second parent-child conversation type is 'reason-explanations', which requires high demands on children such as motivations of characters' behaviors in book content. In advertising contexts, parents could ask questions about the way that persuasion motives behind advertisements are targeting children. This might be more broadly applied to 'general persuasion', not limited to specific advertising contexts. The third conversation type is 'affective

commentary,' which contains positive or negative reactions toward story events in books. Parents may talk about how advertising negatively influences children's materialism, stereotypes, or health, and so on. Or they can also ask children or show children how advertising can help teach the various new information about new products available in the market place. Or they can simply ask their children what they like or do not like about advertising or advertainment content. Conversations about advertising may be helpful if the aim is to help children enhance their advertising or consumer-related knowledge and become wise and critical consumers.

More importantly, it is crucial to assess how these parental advertising mediation strategies are effective in reducing the unintended negative effects of advertising. Buijzen and Valkenburg (2005) verified that active mediation and concept-oriented communication styles can significantly reduce the undesirable effects of advertising such as children's materialism, purchase requests, or family conflicts. Active mediation is recommended to parents as a promising approach to discuss with children (Mendoza, 2009; Nathanson, 1999). On the other hand, restrictive mediation is known to be used by parents of young children, girls, and low-income families (Mendoza, 2009). Also, parents who believe the negative media effects are likely to employ restrictive mediation. Even though its effectiveness was not clearly demonstrated by previous studies, limiting the potential negative effects of media content is considered as one of the good ways protect children from any harms or risks. However, we need to think about if this also applies to newer forms of advertising. Advertising evolves every day, and the effectiveness of parental mediation may be re-assessed to help parents train their children. Most studies have focused on 'parental mediation' rather than how it helps children to have a critical lens for marketplace and advertising. Parental mediation studies exist because we

are interested in how each strategy helps children enhance their media literacy level as well as reduce their materialistic value. Scholars may observe how parents and their children have conversations about advertising or advertainment, which might be more appealing to children. Or longitudinal studies might help us to capture the effectiveness of parental advertising mediation on children's media literacy or materialism. This method may also answer this research question but at the same time, could resolve social desirability bias in parents' responses.

Although there is no clear evidence that parents with higher media literacy evaluate the given media content more negatively or positively, it would be also interesting to explore the relationship between media literacy and parents' perceptions toward media content or media characters specifically. In the previous studies, parents' negative perceptions toward media content was considered as a significant key predictor of parental mediation (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Evans, 2014; Meirick et al., 2009; Nikken & Jansz, 2014; Shin & Huh, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 1999). However, these studies measured if parental media literacy moderates the level of parental mediation. Parents with higher media literacy are more likely to think with a broader viewpoint and more confident talking about media effects and media policies with their children, which potentially means that they are more likely to find potential negative and positive media effects compared to parents with lower media literacy. Nonetheless, none of the studies verified the relationship between these two concepts. To better guide parents with media literacy, future studies could investigate the association between parents' perceptions toward media content and media literacy. Or the research could be more specifically about advertainment and media literacy because the entertaining factor of advertainment might make a difference in parents' perceptions or actions.

Lastly, other potential confounding variables such as color, background music, or the presence of a child in the videos were not considered in the experiment. They were selected as production techniques to attract young child audiences, but I did not analyze or disentangle the effects of any of these message aspects on parental advertising mediation. Stimuli for future experiments may be more systematically and rigorously controlled in future research.

Conclusion

In summary, my dissertation reduced the gap between child-targeted advertising and the entertainment literature. It offers meaningful insights about how media characters presented in advertainment and parental media literacy play a significant role in parental mediation practice of child-targeted advertainment portraying popular media characters. Advertainment formats are still evolving even today in more complicated and entertaining ways. It is important to pay attention to children's media literacy, but also parents' media literacy and parental mediation, which may significantly shape children's critical views on advertising. Although preschool-aged children have been considered too young to become consumers or understand advertising, it is crucial for parents to be prepared and educated for their children's media literacy education and training later.

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APPENDIX A. ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Thank you for taking the time to share about how you perceive information on child-targeted media content featuring media characters. My name is Regina Ahn and I am a doctoral student in College of Media at the University of Illinois.

From this interview, we would like to understand how you perceive child-friendly media content which features popular media characters such as Disney Princesses, Marvel and D.C. Super Heroes. You probably know Disney's movie, Frozen. The original story was derived from the movie in 2013. To extend the story, Disney offers various stories about Anna, Elsa, and Olaf in books, games, apps, and so on. In addition, the audience spread out this story online and created their own related videos. As a result, Frozen became one of the popular Disney movies, and that is how they sell related merchandise to children. There may be a handful of characters that your child likes to watch, play and spend time with on their typical days. We would like to hear about those characters and how you feel about that media content. Our discussion consists of two parts - the first part includes discussions about three videos featuring media characters. The second part will be about knowing your general perceptions and mediation regarding media characters and related media content.

This is not marketing research and we are not trying to help companies sell to you or your children. We simply want to better understand how you think about media character content for understanding children's consumer socialization and education.

Part I. Questions:

Warm-up (rapport-building) questions:
1. Please tell us your name, a little bit about yourself, and your children.

2. Tell me about your child's typical day.
a) Sub-question 1: including preschool, media use, plays, activities with family?
b) Sub-question 2: What type of media activities your child likes to do?

3. Now I'm going to have you look at three short videos [Note for IRB: The first video is a traditional video commercial of *Thomas and Friends Toy Set* and the second video will be a *Lego Marvel Super Hero* mobile game. The last video is one of the unboxing videos about *Disney Princess Toys* from JillianTube HD. You will view the videos and nothing beyond these videos will be provided to each participant]. I will ask you a few questions about each video, so please pay attention to them. Let's begin.

First video: *LEGO® Marvel Super Heroes Universe in Peril:* https://youtu.be/Qn16jKUoaSM

Screenshot from *LEGO® Marvel Super Heroes Universe in Peril* advergame

1. What do you think of the three videos?
a. Prompt: What catches your eye first? Why?
b. Sub-question: What do you think about the purpose of the videos?

2. How would you assess these videos?

3. What do you think your child would notice or like about each video?
a. Sub-question: Which one would they like the most?

4. How would you like to talk about these videos with your child?
a. Sub-question: Does your child also watch anything like these videos, games, or etc.?

Second video: JillianTube HD *Disney Princess Toy Party*: https://youtu.be/KixaZ8M45d0

Screenshot from *JillianTube HD Disney Princess Toy Party*

1. What do you think of the three videos?
a. Prompt: What catches your eye first? Why?
b. Sub-question: What do you think about the purpose of the videos?

2. How would you assess these videos?

3. What do you think your child would notice or like about each video?
a. Sub-question: Which one would they like the most?

4. How would you like to talk about these videos with your child?
a. Sub-question: Does your child also watch anything like these videos, games, or etc.?

Third video: *Thomas and Friends Toy Set*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5aLbRwveGqU

Screenshot from *Thomas Super Train Station Set* commercial

[Following Questions]

1. What do you think of the three videos?
a. Prompt: What catches your eye first? Why?
b. Sub-question: What do you think about the purpose of the videos?

2. How would you assess these videos?

3. What do you think your child would notice or like about each video?
a. Sub-question: Which one would they like the most?

4. How would you like to talk about these videos with your child?
a. Sub-question: Does your child also watch anything like these videos, games, or etc.?

Part II. Questions:

In Part II. we would like to get deeper insights about the media characters and related media content.

1. Can you please describe your child's favorite media characters? How does s/he involve or interact with those characters? Where did s/he learn the characters?
a) Potential prompt: Watching television, playing games or toys, etc.?

2. Please tell me how you think about your child's favorite media characters.
a) Sub-question: How do you evaluate the characters in terms of education, violence, sexuality, race/ethnicity, gender norms, and commercialism?

3. Are there any other media characters that you like or dislike? Why?
a) Sub-question: Does it influence what type of content your child can watch? Does it affect what type of activities your child can do?
b) Here are some examples of the characters that you can think of.

4. How do you talk about those characters with your children? (co-viewing, actively discuss the characters, any content restriction)

5. How do you feel about today's child-targeted advertising?
a) Sub-question: There are many advertisements which feature your child's favorite characters - toys, snacks, games, and so on. How do you perceive those advertising?
b) How do you think of a blurred line between advertising and entertainment?
c) *Have you heard of 'advertainment'? How do you think about this term?*

*** Next, I would like you to share your thoughts on 'advertainment' content. Advertainment refers to promotional practices that integrate brand communications within the content of entertainment products. Brand communications are now present in the content of a broad range of entertainment vehicles, including TV and movies, radio shows, songs and music videos, video games, plays, and even novels. The Lego Marvel mobile game and unboxing video which you watched previously are examples of advertainment. **Please let me know if you felt the given definition of advertainment was sufficient. Next questions will be about advertainment content, so please feel free to ask me if you have questions about advertainment.**

6. How do you interact with your child regarding advertainment content which shows media characters?
a) Prompt: games, videos, etc.
b) Sub-question: Is there any restriction on watching brand placements in the videos or playing games integrated with advertising?

7. Do you watch the advertainment featuring those characters with your child?
a) Prompts: Do you stay close when your child watches the video? Do you watch the content together?
b) Sub-question: Do you talk about advertising while you watch it with your child?

We're about ready to wrap up today's interview. Along the way, I've taken some notes and I want to check with you on some of the main points you made to check my understanding. You let me know if there's something I misunderstood or needs to be added. [Summarize key points by question]. Was there anything I misunderstood or need to add from our interview?

Last, I want to check with you to see if other experiences or opinions have come to mind that relate to our interview today that you did not have a chance to share or would like to clarify/reiterate?

Thank you for your participation!

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEWEES' INFORMATION

Name (gender)	Age	Race	Occupation	Education	Income	Children
Mel (F)	39	Two or More	Employed for wages	Bachelor's	Less than $25,000	4 (F)
Robert (M)	38	White	Employed for wages	Doctorate	Less than $25,000	11 (M), 4 (F)
Aimee (F)	31	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$100,000-$149,999	3 (F)
Wilson (M)	33	Asian	A student	Master's	$25,000-$34,999	3 (M), 1 (M)
Kristy (F)	39	White	Employed for wages, Self-employed	Master's	$25,000-$34,999	4 (M)
Nam (F)	42	Asian	A homemaker	Master's	$35,000-$49,999	14 (M), 11 (F),8 (M), 6 (M)
Adele (F)	35	Asian	A homemaker	Master's	$35,000-$49,999	6 (M)
Anna (F)	33	White	A homemaker	Associate	$35,000-$49,999	8 (M), 6 (F), 5 (M), 3 (F), 1 (F)
Ariana (F)	38	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$35,000-$49,999	8 (M), 4 (F)
James (M)	32	White	Employed for wages	Some college, no degree	$35,000-$49,999	4 (F), 2 (F)
Grace (F)	43	White	Self-employed	Master's	$35,000-$49,999	13 (F), 12 (M), 6 (F)
Curtis (M)	40	Two or More	Employed for wages	Master's	$50,000-$74,999	8 (M), 4 (F)
Jane (F)	31	White	Employed for wages	Bachelor's	$50,000-$74,999	4 (M), 2 (M)
Betty (F)	35	Two or More	Employed for wages	Master's	$50,000-$74,999	6 (M)
Allie (F)	33	White	A homemaker	Master's	$50,000-$74,999	6 (M), 3 (M), 2 (M)
Calvin (M)	41	White	Employed for wages	Bachelor's	$50,000-$74,999	14 (M), 12 (M), 10 (M), 8 (F), 5 (F)
Amity (F)	34	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$50,000-$74,999	8 (M), 5 (M)
Steve (M)	31	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$50,000-$74,999	4 (M), 1 (M)
Lisa (F)	30	Asian	A homemaker	Bachelor's	$75,000-$99,999	4 (F), 2 (F)
Jenna (F)	34	White	A homemaker	Bachelor's	$75,000-$99,999	8 (M), 6 (F), 4 (M)
Michael (M)	35	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$75,000-$99,999	4 (M), 2 (F)
Frank (M)	36	Asian	Employed for wages	Doctorate	$75,000-$99,999	4 (M)
Timothy (M)	35	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$100,000-$149,999	6 (M), 3 (M), 1 (F)
Katherine (F)	36	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$100,000-$149,999	5 (F)

APPENDIX B (CONT.) INTERVIEWEES' INFORMATION

April (F)	37	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$100,000-$149,999	5 (F), 3 (F), 1 (M)
Sandra (F)	46	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$100,000-$149,999	5 (M)
Jenny (F)	36	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$100,000-$149,999	4 (F), 1 (F)
Adam (M)	40	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$100,000-$149,999	6 (F), 3 (M)
Elena (F)	36	White	Employed for wages	Master's	$100,000-$149,999	4 (F), 2 (M)
Victoria (F)	36	Do not want to reveal	A homemaker	Master's	More than $150,000	8 (M), 4 (F)
Thomas (M)	50	White	Self-employed	Bachelor's	More than $150,000	12 (F), 9 (F), 6 (F)
Tom (M)	38	White	Employed for wages	Master's	More than $150,000	5 (M)
Yvette (F)	44	Asian	Employed for wages	Professional	More than $150,000	7 (F), 4 (M)
William (M)	47	Asian	Employed for wages	Professional	More than $150,000	7 (F), 4 (M)
Mary (F)	39	White	Employed for wages	Bachelor's	More than $150,000	10 (F), 8 (F), 5 (M), 2 (M)

** Note: I used pseudonyms here for the confidentiality purpose.

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW EXCERPTS

APPENDIX C1. Parents' perceptions about 'good' and 'bad' media characters

Parent	Media characters	Verbatim
Adam	[Positive] Daniel Tiger Curious George Paw Patrol	"Daniel Tiger and Curious George, they share the same themes, they have lessons, behave okay, yeah, their message is good. It's not just about entertainment."
Mary		"They are wholesome, also they talk about good preschool topics like sharing, exploring, learning, and being a good friend. Daniel Tiger also talks about emotions. I also like Curious George, being curious and helping each other."
Amity		"They do teamwork. Sometimes, I think, it's hard for a TV show to have a problem without things being like really kind of mean or people complaining."
Katherine		"It's not violent and has good messages to kids. She loves Daniel Tiger (emotionally educational; pick a theme - "grown-ups come back").
Frank		Frank: "I watch a few (Paw Patrol) episodes with him. It's a good cartoon." Interviewer: "Which part is good?" Frank: "The way it tells a story. Each episode is a story to help someone. It helps, you know, somebody in need. So, it's good."
Mel		"I like Paw Patrol, teaching teamwork and positive attitudes."
Amity	Superheroes SpongeBob	"A lot of the superhero ones I'm not a big fan at this age. When they grow older I know Benjamin wants to watch Star Wars, but I said he has to wait until he gets old"
Anna		"Like how they are not normal people like we are. Like some of the things in the show are pretend and made up for them and that maybe there are ways that they talk to characters in the show that is not how we would normally talk to other people. It's just in that show. And since they are made up, they get to have special powers and things. They can't fly, they start thinking that they can."
Aimee		"The violence factor is too much for her right now. I really don't even think she would like it or understand that really."
Grace		"There has too much fantasy, it's getting away from reality"
Yvette		"During our trip, we went to DC a couple of months ago, to visit friends and family, and then, we went to hotel and he watched SpongeBob, which is really awful and really violent, so, he kept saying it's funny, no Chase, it's not funny, it's violent, that part, SpongeBob's brain popped out and he looked at him, it was not age-appropriate at all, he really wanted to watch it."

APPENDIX C2. Parents' thoughts on the purpose of the unboxing videos and the advergame

Parent (child)	Parental media literacy	Verbatim
Katherine	Parents' identifying selling intent of sponsored unboxing videos	"So, where the other one is a little more of a subtle advertising because It's like a kid sitting at a table, the camera's not using a lot of angles, it's not to the level that you think someone did another cell phone but at the same time it is a little more subtle."
Amity		"This one I would say it is a little bit about product promotion because they're giving you the exact sizes of things and collect all 12"
Adele		"This type of advertisement will attract my son. Because it tells a very detailed about the toys."
Ariana		"Is to sell the product, so to describe the Disney products and all of the accessories and items that come with it and to show what the different items do"
Anna		"To sell the product, yep, and to make money trying to sell the product."
April		"Okay. So that makes me think just of the content that they do, I try to do too, which of course is sponsored. So, I think that if I think about the intent of the advertiser…"
James		"I mean, otherwise she probably wouldn't be mentioning like this requires batteries and this requires batteries so there's more of a review there but then there's also the advertisement and selling of the toys."
Grace		"This is definitely trying to sell those toys, advertisements!"
Calvin		"It is a commercial in the guise of a piece of entertainment."
Victoria	Other purposes of the Lego Marvel superhero advergame	"I can see that players can increase the level of the game and they need to get puzzle pieces with other partners. Maybe a team thing, team work?"
Thomas		"Well, I am not really sure about the purpose"
Aimee		"Probably to teach children that they need to achieve goals, entertainment purpose."
James		"I just didn't feel like an advertisement because, like I said, the game play, a good chunk of that was not very action-packed."
Adele		"Bring adult movie to a kid's view that's what I think, I don't know, honestly."
Mel		"To me I think they did it for, honestly, they did it so that you can learn, you can gain points, because I saw there were points on the game. So, you can earn points. Actually, like motor, what's the word I'm looking for, use your skills."
Ariana		"The purpose of this is to get the kids interested in this videogame."

APPENDIX C3. Parents' perceptions: Traditional advertising vs. toy unboxing videos

Parent	Attitudes toward ads	Verbatim
Adele	'Somewhat okay' attitudes toward traditional advertising	"My attitude would be like not bad, not good but somewhere in the middle."
Amity		Amity: That's just what you have to teach your kids about. Why do you think they're making this? They make it because they want you to think that Superstation is the coolest thing ever. Interviewer: So, if you just remind them of what they're doing, then, is fine. Amity: Yes, because they'll have to do that their whole life, everywhere. The media and everything else. Everybody has always got a purpose that they want, and you have to be thinking about what that purpose is and if that's good for you and if you want to buy Thomas Superstation, then, in a year, you can probably save up enough allowance to buy the Superstation.
Katherine		"I think it's clearly commercial, there is nothing wrong with the content, it was nice and short, thank you for mentioning the batteries, you know, because that's the worst thing, right? Especially this time of year, Christmas morning or their birthday, uh, what batteries do we have, actually you cannot play with that because you cannot have that batteries, you just got this gift and you really want to."
Anna		Interviewer: Most of them were like cable television, probably. Anna: I think they haven't really, actually seen very many toy commercials. Interviewer: I see, I see. But, it's ok to see commercials because you're with them? Anna: Yeah.
William		"It's okay to watch commercials because it will move away within 30 seconds"

APPENDIX C3 (cont.) Parents' perceptions: Traditional advertising vs. toy unboxing videos

Parent	Attitudes toward ads	Verbatim
Anna	Negative attitudes toward the toy unboxing video vs. traditional television advertisement	"If a kid is doing it then no matter, it automatically seems permissible. Or like, something that they could or should have, if a kid has it then it's something that they as kids could and should have."
Adam		"Yeah, that's just gross, my 6-year-old would recognize that as gross like right now, partly because, that fact that we like, at the very beginning, she's watching YouTube video, and something like this would come out, and then like, I would not make effort to hide my disgust when I walk into the room and saw "what are you watching? What is this?" and her mom would have probably shown worse reaction, we've talked about this thing."
Yvette		"I don't know why we watched this, but, do you know about surprise toys? YouTube has clips about unwrapping toys, and sometimes, my daughter watches. You should stop watching it, but it's cool, you should think about the volume watching what's inside, they are not great…My Little Pony? Like a Squishy thing, I dig in a couple of it, but those toys, you play with it for few times and that's it, kind of stuffed animals, they are very cute, you sleep with it for a couple of nights, it's not like a Lego or like books, you just don't play with it anymore, I think we got one or two and she said it was very cute and she was happy about it for a day or two, but then, it was not very engaging toy. She didn't play with it (after a few days later)."
Sandra		"These are totally annoying to me, this is like Ryan, but they make them into spokesman, they started out Ryan with less of this… I've seen other things like they are kind of phony presenters, putting on their persona, it's annoying, and then, obviously the production value is good, they have done a good job with like music and all different shots, you know the camera tilts, nice camera and everything, but it's pretty annoying, and I mean and the whole, you know, you need AA batteries, who cares about the battery information? That's too scripted."
Tom		"He will never to be able to watch that stuff. That's absolutely the worst. It is bad as, you know, the He Man cartoons, you know, Transformers, just to sell toys. I guess that's my reaction toward it?"
William		"I think it is a good advertisement video, having a little girl introducing, easier connection to the audience, which will be children, Carley's age… it is a promoting video and does not add any value… it is really the value really stays in advertisers' side, I don't think Carley is benefiting by looking at it, because there is no education value."
Katherine		"For me, I really wonder why their parents let them do this. Oh, their parents."
Allie		"I don't know, I guess I does feel it's different, or seen different, like in commercials, I expect them to try to sell me something, but I don't necessarily just automatically expect that on YouTube videos, I feel like that's more for entertainment, that's the content, not the advertisements, so I think that kind of bothers me that what should be in the entertainment is in the actually kind of masquerading this. You know entertainment is, you know, more of advertisements."

APPENDIX C4. Parental mediation of advertising in general

Parent (child)	Mediation strategies	Verbatim
Mary	'Save and wait' Parental mediation of a child's request	"When he sees commercials, he'll say, can I get that? Or, you know, I want that for my birthday something. Normally it's, you can certainly add it to your birthday list."
Aimee		"Lately we've obviously said, Well, you know, maybe if you're a good girl, maybe Santa will bring that for you. Or maybe you can get that for Christmas. You know, her birthday is in March. So that would be another one like from now until March, basically like, well, if you if that's something you think you want, then maybe you can ask for it for your birthday or put it on listening to your birthday."
Thomas		"She'll say 'I want that', and like "well, you know, that's nice you want that, but you can put it on your list for your birthday or something you know, does not mean you'll get it, um, you know, don't get too much into the kind of specific that one which involves to advertising so much."
Tom		"We should give him a talk of 'no', you are not getting that… We will, on Saturday morning, sometimes, we will go to Artmart and have breakfast and you know, there has a toy store… he will get 10 minutes for he can go back and play, he tries to be more smooth about it, he tries like, dad, I really wish I would have more of this or that kind of thing, I really wish I would have that car. He won't say 'buy me that car, I want this car'. He tries to be clever, and we still direct with an answer of, that's something you can ask for Christmas. That sort of thing."
Mel		Interviewer: what about, have you ever talked about advertising? Mel: What I told? Yes, when she watches TV with me, sometimes she pays attention, sometimes, my favorite programs I like to watch, she saw on TV that she wants, I have to explain to her that you cannot have everything you want, I know those are cool, but you cannot have everything you want, you have to understand that they do that advertising I mean, to entice kids, they have enticed adults, I have seen some stuff as a grown woman that I want, so I explain, you cannot have everything you want. She'll say, "I want that, I want that, I want that", it's fun to look at, but you have to imagine, would you really want to play with it for a couple days from now? Or you still really want that next year? Or will you be still interested in it after 2 hours? Or 10 minutes in her case? I just tell her that "I don't have money for that and she understands that". Or maybe we can have that for her birthday or maybe she can get it on Christmas. I've been telling it since she was two.
Nam		"When he asks something after watching advertisements, I'll say, 'you cannot have everything, if you like it you can have that on your birthday or Christmas, then they love it."
Wilson		"I'll say, you can get it on Christmas or Thanksgiving, or sometimes I say, if you go to daycare, you'll get 5, he actually does not know about $ yet. I would like to teach him responsibility.
April		"The kids do not get things outside of birthdays and Christmas without working towards it. I mean, like one time we were at Target and she wanted, I did get her Legos because I love Legos. Well that's something that will be well used, but an impulse buy like that would only be on special occasions or she'd have to earn money towards it. Chores or above and beyond chores even, you know, like clean the room really well."

APPENDIX C4 (cont.) Parental mediation of advertising in general

Parent (child)	Mediation strategies	Verbatim
Yvette	Active mediation for advertising in general	"Sometimes, my husband, would say like, 'it's not as fine as it's what they made it, seems like in commercials, you know, they try to sell products to you, yeah, advertising try to sell products, maybe not good as they look, then my kids would say, it looks so fun, it looks so cute! They don't care as much because it looks good to them, but hopefully like if we can talk more about money and saving all those things. To Chase, I always say you need to save the money to do it."
Amity		"Yes, I think, if I can, I try to show him why I think it will break easily. But it's not always exactly obvious for young kids. Sometimes, TV made it look like it would work. So, not so much more reliable than mom but, sometimes, too, because a lot of the things they watch on YouTube they'll have like little advertisements and whatnot and we will talk about those, too and we'll say, "What do you think they're trying to do? Why are they showing this right now?" So, we will about, they're trying to make you want this so that you think you need it and that you will go and buy it. So hopefully they can start to figure that out. Sometimes, I tell them about things like when I was a kid that there was this one toy, a stuffed animal like a cat kind of toy and it had a long tongue and a brush on the end and in the commercial it talked. So, when I was a little kid I thought it would talk I was so excited my mom got it for me and then it was like the worst toy ever in my mind because it didn't talk. So, we'll talk about, will this actually do, that when you get that toy home? Sometimes for kids, it's not obvious and they can't read the fine print on the commercials all the time."
Ariana		"We discuss that, and I will say, just because it's on doesn't mean you get it. Because Pearl was just talking yesterday about the Charmin toilet paper commercial and she said that bear on there, his name is Charmin. And I said no, the toilet paper is called Charmin, the bear is just part of the commercial. And she said, well we need that kind of toilet paper and I said, no we don't. I took her to the bathroom, and I said this toilet paper that we get from Aldi is just fine. You would know no difference between that and Charmin. So, we talk about that kind of advertising."
Calvin	Restrictive mediation of advertising in general - PBS Kids	I don't know if there is any (commercials) on PBS Kids.
Adam		"I don't really worry about turning on PBS Kids. Their commercials are not inappropriate or violent."
Mary		"PBS Kids is a strong channel for my son."
Elena		"We want to somewhat limit her media use. PBS shows are only allowed at home"
Jenny		"We don't watch live TV, well, PBS Kids, they have no commercials there"
Allie		"They do see some commercials, but PBS has limited commercials, they are like ads for other shows. PBS channel is different from Disney. They only watch commercials from grandparents' or his friends' houses. Their screen time is limited, so we don't have time to talk about advertising."

APPENDIX C5. Parental mediation of the sponsored toy unboxing video

Parent	Mediation strategies	Verbatim
Yvette	Restrictive mediation of toy unboxing videos	"I will still say 'no' and introduce other TV shows which do not sell any products, which only has stories."
Adam		"This is pretty standard example of why she is not allowed to watch YouTube videos anymore, because the stuff like this would pop up, and I don't feel like there is a room in my children's brains for that, and the other commercials (television commercials), I don't why the other is okay than this, maybe because I am used to. That's not okay at all."
William		"I would say, I don't want you to watch this video because we are not going to buy these toys."
Jane		"We don't let them watch YouTube now, so I would never turn on one of those videos. If we watched that, probably he would want one of those dolls, he has never seen any princess things ever, but I want one, that girl has one, I want one… "We don't need to watch kids playing with toys, you have toys, it would produce some jealousy in his heart or materialism, I want all of those toys that the kid has."
Tom		"I would try to avoid it as much as I can"
Calvin		"It makes me glad that my kids don't watch YouTube videos. That's exactly the kind of content that we avoid."
Jenny		"If I watch August watching the video, I would say 'turn it off, probably distract her to watch other videos."
Ariana		"Mom, there was this video and it had these dolls that I really want, No, and she would be like, okay."
Sandra		"Let's watch something else."
Robert	Coviewing with 'light' conversations about the unboxing video	"I will ask questions and listen to her answers about the video."
Ariana		"We would probably just talk about the characters. The Disney characters, who was in it, what the Cinderella toy did. I wouldn't have much more conversation about that."
Betty		Yes, so sometimes it just comes up, where he is like, "Mommy, look at this," you know, wants to show it to me. Other times it will just be he will randomly start talking about it. Yes (I mostly listen to what he says), and then he will tell me about it, and I will go, "Oh okay, that's good."
April		Interviewer: What kind of conversation did you have with her? April: I think if we would have watched that one right, you know, would have just commented that, oh, those look so fun, you know. I don't know if there's much else to say, I think I would have acknowledged her feelings on it.
Michael		"Let's watch the video together, what do you think about? Is it cool?"
Robert	Active mediation of the toy unboxing video: Informing about the videos and asking questions	"I would explain that the girl in the video is just showing different kinds of princess toys because she wants to show them."
Curtis		"They don't have all those toys, they are just showing all toys to you"
Sandra		"(Previously watched Ryan Toy's Review) "I say, Ryan is getting all toys from toy store, not form their parents"
Victoria		"You can't have, they are just showing the toys."
William		"What are you learning from the video?"

APPENDIX C6. Parental mediation associated with previous media experience

Parent	Theme	Verbatim
Betty	Parental mediation associated with previous media experience	"Yes, definitely. My son, I think that he would like the fact that it was a collectible thing, he likes that, "I collect them all" kind of thing because a lot of the things that he likes, like the LOL dolls and things like that, are collectibles. He likes to look at the sheet and be like, "Okay, which ones do I have?" and which ones he doesn't have yet. I think he would like that aspect of it the most. He hasn't asked for those kinds of dolls and I don't know if he would after that ad or not, it's hard for me to say. He asks for other kinds of dolls, so I don't know, maybe he would."
April		"Yes. I think that's, I mean, I don't know if I've ever seen one that's that, obviously an ad you know, but yeah, for sure. I mean, they all the time, it's, you know, the little people that show the different toys, you know, you only see the person's hands, but they're trying out things like, yeah, that came into our lives right away as soon as they started seeing things on YouTube, so yeah."
Michael		"I know, I am sure, I do remember Alex has stumbled upon kids reviewing videos sometimes, typically we are not crazy about that, letting them watch that. That one, the girl is adorable, even though it was fast-paced, it seemed to be more accessible. We may still like, do you need to watch those promos, but (it's okay to watch it absolutely). So, we are like "let's try to watch it together, is it cool? What do you think about it?"
Steve		"Things he watches on YouTube Kids, most of them is Peppa Pig, Ryan's Toy Review, you heard of that? And then it would just be like random videos that I don't understand why anyone would ever make or put on YouTube, like a kid dress up like superheroes or something, people trying to get subscribers."
Ariana		"Her brother James used to watch her brother. His name is Evan. He would do the Lego videos and so James would watch that because he would put them together. It's a good way to show what products are out right now, better than a commercial I would say because it's pretty to the point"

APPENDIX C7. Parental mediation of the advergame

Parent	Mediation strategies	Verbatim
Grace	Restrictive mediation of the advergame	"No videogames are not allowed at home. I am kind of worried about game addiction"
Anna		"We've told them that when they're older that they can watch them, like probably ten years older."
Adele		"I say, you probably need to wait"
William		"I will give alternative options to choose like treasure hunts or cooking games."
Frank		"I will not allow my son to play this game"
Amity		"You are too young, and they are not being nice."
Aimee		"I might say, you don't play games on our phones anyway, so we're not going to allow you to do that. I will show characters in movies than games."
Kristy	Active mediation of advergame: Focusing on violent and unrealistic setting, not advertising	"I don't think this age are ready for that, violence, cruelty, that's kind of concern too… well, it's not acceptable, and you should not be the one who starts it, again, if you are attacked, you fight back, but you don't start it." "Do you think this is good? Do you think this is funny? No, this is not good, if this is not good and not funny, why are we watching it?"
Steve		"We will talk about why they are good guys and bad guys, he would probably ask, why the good guys are mad (Hulk)… also, we'll talk like, that's not real life, this is a game, just like that?"
Curtis		"We might talk about the hitting. I know Owen, he's always asking about who the bad guys are. In like the Marvel Universe and you know DC like there's always a clear villain, but in some cartoons, there isn't a clear villain, or they'll swap back and forth and so that might be an element because the Hulk is confusing, right?"
Victoria		"I will explain "this is not real" if my daughter gets too scared"

APPENDIX D. EXPERIMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

The next questions ask you about your child's media habits. Please answer the following questions.

*** Note to IRB: Participants will be either see one of the questions (Paw Patrol or Superheroes).

1) Have you heard of Paw Patrol?
a. Yes, I've heard of Paw Patrol. I know it very well.
b. Yes, I've heard of it, but not sure what is about.
c. No, I've never heard about Paw Patrol.

2) Have you heard of superheroes (DC, Marvel)?
a. Yes, I've heard of superheroes. I know the characters very well.
b. Yes, I've heard of them, but not sure what are about.
c. No, I've never heard about superheroes.

*** Note to IRB: When participants answer the question above as **1-a** or **1-b** ("I know Paw Patrol"), they will see one of the following videos and answer the questions.

PAW Patrol mobile game: https://youtu.be/7nkJxffFXpI

PAW Patrol toy unboxing video: https://youtu.be/AN0vUYAQvX0

Questions:

- As a parent, what do you think about this video/content?

- What do you think the *purpose* of this video/content is?

- How would the video/content attract *your child's* attention?

- What values or messages are presented in the video/content?

- Is there anything omitted from the content?

*** Note to IRB: When participants answer the question above as **2-a** or **2-b** ("I know the superheroes"), they will see one of the following videos and answer the questions.

Superhero mobile game: https://youtu.be/nOGzvVc8BmE

Superhero toy unboxing video: https://youtu.be/03JMZ6SeDFg

Questions:

- As a parent, what do you think about this video/content?

- What do you think the *purpose* of this video/content is?

- How would the video/content attract *your child's* attention?

- What values or messages are presented in the video/content?

- Is there anything omitted from the content?

Next, we would like to get your perceptions about media and advertising. Please respond how much you agree with the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree)

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Buy-one-get-one-free deals are designed to get people attracted.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Wearing a shirt with a brand logo or media character on it makes you into a walking advertisement.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Media messages from television, movie, or social media have inherent values or points of view.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Two people may see the same media content and get very different ideas about it.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Different people can see the same media content and feel completely different about it.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Media content may catch one person's attention but not even be noticed by another person.	①	②	③	④	⑤
People's attitudes and behaviors are influenced by media messages whether they realize it or not.	①	②	③	④	⑤
People are influenced by advertising.	①	②	③	④	⑤
When people create media content (TV shows, movies, social media), every shot and message are carefully planned.	①	②	③	④	⑤
There are often hidden messages in media content.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Media don't usually show life like it really is.	①	②	③	④	⑤

TV shows, movies, or social media content make the reality more attractive than it really is.	①	②	③	④	⑤
When I see a good deal, it is usually not actually a good deal in the long run.					
When you see media messages from television, movies, or social media, it is very important to think about what was left out of the content.	①	②	③	④	⑤
Some media messages leave out a lot of important information.	①	②	③	④	⑤

*** Note to IRB: For those who watched Paw Patrol or superhero videos, they will be instructed to answer the following questions.

The next questions will ask you what you think about Marvel or DC <u>superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol.</u> Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements (1 = Strongly disagree 7 = Strongly agree).

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to learn the alphabet and grammar.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to learn numbers.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to see	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

things from a variety of points of view.							
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to get interested in planning, learning, and problem solving.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to help others.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to think that violence is an acceptable way to solve problems.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
The media content (television, game, book, toy) of Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol stimulates my child to imitate the violence.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol frightens my child.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol cause nightmares.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol teach my child gender stereotypes and norms.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol teach my child racial and ethnic stereotypes.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to engage in opposite-sex activities (e.g., encouraging your daughter to play with robots)	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol make my child pay attention to commercials featuring the characters.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol teach my child new products featuring the character.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to purchase more products related	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

to the character (e.g., character toys, clothes, games, etc.).							
Marvel/DC superheroes/dog characters in Paw Patrol encourage my child to think about character merchandise to buy.	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦

The next questions will ask you what you know or think about advertainment content.

Advertainment is promotional practices that integrate brand communications within entertainment such as brands featured in TV and movies, radio shows, songs and music videos, video games, plays, and even novels.

The mobile game or unboxing video which you watched previously is an example of advertainment portraying media characters.

We are interested in how you interact with your child regarding advertainment content featuring **Marvel/DC superheroes/ dog characters in Paw Patrol**. Imagine that you are answering questions related to advergames, product placement, or unboxing videos featuring **Marvel/DC superheroes and Paw Patrol.**

Please read the questions and select the answers which best fit your behavior (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree).

Questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I (would) tell my child that advertainment content depicts Paw Patrol/superheroes as better than they really are.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) tell my child that integrated advertising in videos, games, and programs featuring Paw Patrol/superheroes does not always tell the truth.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) tell my child that the purpose of advertainment content featuring Paw Patrol/superheroes is to sell products.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) tell my child that not all advertised products featuring Paw Patrol/superheroes are of good quality.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) tell my child that some brands are integrated as advertising in videos, games, or programs which feature Paw Patrol/superheroes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) tell my child that (s)he should not watch or play when (s)he watches Paw Patrol/superheroes integrated with advertising.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) tell my child that (s)he should not watch certain channels featuring Paw Patrol/superheroes because they produce too many media character-related programs, games, or videos with integrated advertising.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) tell my child to switch to another channel or do something else to avoid advertainment content featuring Paw Patrol/superheroes.	①	②	③	④	⑤

I (would) tell my child that (s)he should not engage in Paw Patrol/superhero-related programs, videos, or games with integrated advertising.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) talk to my child about how advertainment content featuring Paw Patrol/superheroes is fun.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) stay nearby when my child engages in advertainment content featuring Paw Patrol/superheroes.	①	②	③	④	⑤
I (would) watch advertainment featuring Paw Patrol/superheroes together with my child.	①	②	③	④	⑤

The last section is about your demographic information.

1. To which gender identity do you most identify?
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender Female
   - Transgender Male
   - Gender variant/Not-conforming
   - Not listed (_____)
   - Prefer not to answer

2. What is your race?
   - White
   - Black or African American
   - American Indian and Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander
   - Two or more races
   - Others (List:_____)

3. What is your education level?
   - Less than high school
   - High school graduate (includes equivalency)
   - Some college, no degree
   - Associate degree
   - Bachelor's degree
   - Master’s degree
   - Professional degree
   - Doctorate degree.

4. What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?
   - Less than $25,000
   - $25,000 to $34,999
   - $35,000 to $49,999
   - $50,000 to $74,999
   - $75,000 to $99,999

- $100,000 to $149,999
- $150,000 or more

***** Is there anything you would like to add? (e.g., responses you could not provide in the previous sections, technical issues/problems, etc.).**

_____

You can complete the study by clicking the next button below. You will see "your response has been recorded" message.

Thank you very much for your participation!

APPENDIX E. EXPERIMENT PARTICIPANTS' INFORMATION

		Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Parents' educational level	Less than high school	4	2.0
	High school graduate	60	32.3
	Some college, no degree	45	22.7
	Associate degree (2-year)	19	9.6
	Bachelor's degree (4-year)	33	16.7
	Master's degree	31	15.7
	Professional degree	4	2.0
	Doctorate	2	1.0
Parents' household income	Less than $25,000	41	20.7
	$25,000-$34,999	22	11.1
	$35,000-$49,999	33	16.7
	$50,000-$74,999	37	18.7
	$75,000-$99,999	24	12.1
	$100,000-$140,000	32	16.2
	$150,000 or more	9	4.5
Parents' gender	Female	97	49.0
	Male	100	50.5
	Transgender male	1	.5
Parents' race	White	152	76.8
	Black or African American	20	10.1
	American Indian or Alaska Native	3	1.5
	Asian	11	5.6
	More than two races	8	4.0
	Others	4	2.0